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VOLUME XV, NUMBER 1 SPRING 1962

One Sunday Morning at the Russian Bath (*story*) HERBERT GOLD 15
The Sickness (*verse*) FREDERICK SEIDEL 38
Six Poems MAXINE W. KUMIN 43
She with a Missing Finger (*verse*) ISABEL CASSERES 49
Shades of Keats and Marvell ANTHONY HECHT 50
Poems by: HAROLD WITT, 72; ROBERT BLY, 76; WILLIAM MEREDITH, 79; JOHN HOLLOWAY, 82; WILLIAM STAFFORD, 84; HOLLIS SUMMERS, 86; FRANZ SCHNEIDER, 88; LOUIS SIMPSON, 90
American Bards and Liberal Reviewers PAUL LEVINE 91
Colette and Strether MARVIN MUDRICK 110
Theatre Chronicle JOHN SIMON 114
Dangerous Disconnections NORMAN N. HOLLAND 123
Ballet and Music Chronicle B. H. HAGGIN 128

Reviews

Novels, and Being a Novelist ROGER SALE 134
Problems of the Literary Biographer MARIUS BEWLEY 143
The Poetics of Selfhood RICHARD FOSTER 149
God on Chevauchée DENIS DONOGHUE 154

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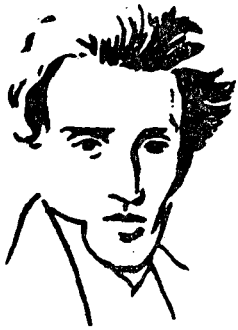

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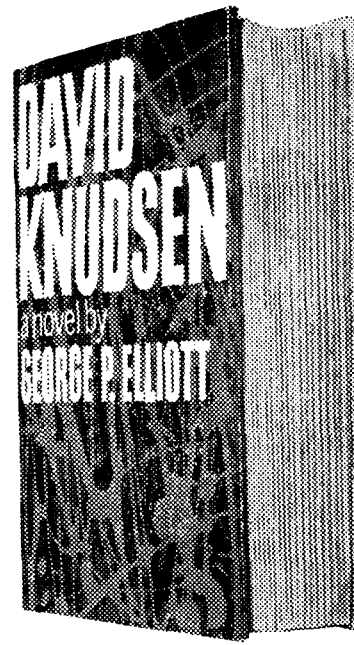

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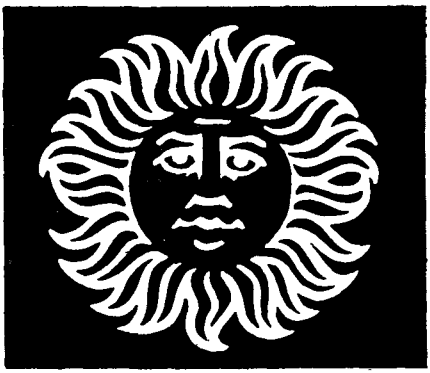

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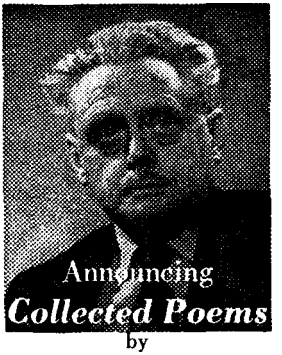

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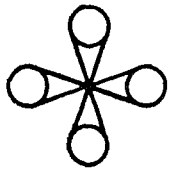

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HERBERT GOLD

One Sunday Morning at the Russian Bath

WHEN MY FATHER TOOK ME with him to the Russian bath and said, "Come sit by me—come!—sit!" but then sank into gambler's lust, hunched over cards all morning and afternoon, my unanswered love for him turned to gall within me. I had gotten rid of girls, my mob of sisters, my mother; Dad and I were stripped down to the naked weather of manliness, boyhood, and masculine loafing; business, the Depression, Hitler, and Father Coughlin were flung outside of Sunday; but now fifty-two more enemies were stacked up to do battle with me for my father—a deck of cards, worn and slick as money, and like money, smelling of pockets. I was merely jealous of my uncles, of his friends, of all the card-players; I hated the cards themselves, which my frowning father fingered so tenderly, caressing forth their deepest meaning, his lips pursed and his unshaven face creased with concentration and his eyes bright and withdrawn. I wanted to destroy the cards so that he could see *me* with those all-seeing, yellowish, crocodile eyes. I wandered in narrow pride and fury, my toes curling against slippery tile.

"Jack, tray, king," someone said, "so cut again." This gibbering chant was my enemy. But it was my father's pleasure, who embraced the risks of capricious fate in that hard play in history of the early thirties. He was a lover of chanciness in a chancy time, and how could I, skinny and woeful, compete with lust and history? *Come sit with me while I play* did not ask enough of me, gave me too little.

"You are never secure. A man is never secure. If a man is a man, he is never secure."

Taking his best hold, making sure in an unsure world—this was my father's deadly earnest game during those Depression days when the NRA spread its eagle over the America of hoboes on freight trains, of the enraged debate about corn-burning and court-packing, a nation bewildered by sudden hunger and doubt.

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I was eight years old in Cleveland in 1932, and when I heard that the banks were closed and we were "poor," I asked my mother: "Can I wear corduroy pants if we're poor?" She was weeping at the sink, cleaning the salad, and my father was saying as he awaited his dinner, "What means to be secure? No difference now. I got a young head, grownup hands, I can make it again."

"Won't the bankers open up a little bit? Those thieves and bandits? Is it all gone? Will they pay a few cents on the dollar, would it hurt them?" my mother asked through her sobs.

"It was only paper," my father said, looking at his black stumps of fingernails and the horny, muscular, hairy backs of his hands, "only paper, so stop crying. Put a little lemon with the salad, will you?"

"You want I should peel the cucumbers?" she asked, the storm of tears running every which way across her face. "They're nice cukes."

"Slice, don't peel," he said gently.

Money was not to be trusted in those days; it did not reward a man with sweet heart talk as a plump artichoke did. My father pampered the heads of lettuce in the cooler by sprinkling them gently from a gardening can in the evening, and lettuce heads sipped gratefully and awaited his return in the morning; shocks of celery squeaked with delight when he girdled them round with blue rubber bands and put them on parade across crates in the window; but money? No answer. *Tingachug, tingachug,* went its false noise in the cash register, but who knew from profit margins in those days? He was often paid at the store in "scrip," promises by bankrupt Cuyahoga County to hungry sewer workers, or I.O.U.'s from wolfish Black Legionnaires, or genuine Canadian Scotch with cherrypits floating in it (bootleggers eat, too), or post-dated checks by little ladies in electric cars, who then asked: "Would you plug into me for an hour or two?"

"What?"

"The battery needs just a little juice to get me home, Mr. Gold, and since you have already proven yourself such a gentleman—"

"Chrisamighty. Drive around to the back and tell Andy to get out the extension cord."

And relief checks. And church funds. And ahoy the touch from old friends recently out of business: "It's the A & P, it's the de-

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pression, it's the racketeers they're all Italian, it's my wife was nagging me so I couldn't sleep nights—"

"Next time get yourself an Italian wife," my father said. "They're good to a man and hardworking. All Right! I can spare you maybe twenty if you promise—"

"I'll return it in two weeks. I'm going for supervisor on the W. P. and A. I got a cousin he's very big in Columbus—"

"Columbus really excites him, yeah? And what about Dayton? Youngstown? Dave, listen, the smoke tickle your ears? Don't live in a dream. Take the job you can get, lots of my best friends sell brooms—that's business, too—and give it back to me when you got it."

"I'm sure to make supervisor, Sam, because I got a good head and I hate bending over and my cousin in Columbus. . . ."

Ahoy and goodbye, there went the day's profit and my corduroy pants. My father stood shaking his head, putting his hands for comfort on the firm chill back of a pet cabbage, because Dave would never make supervisor, I.O.U.'s and scrip are only promises to pay, and what is cash itself? Only an electric promise we allow ourselves to be plugged into, like love.

But some promises are kept! Especially the ones a man makes to himself! Therefore, dragging out the extension cord, he grew magically confident and boisterous as the Depression, like a mean-eyed cop, put its breath on our lives and looked for violations. The virtues of saving were in disrepute; my father thrived. He did not pity the poor very much, I suppose, since he felt their feet in his galoshes when he rushed out to the market with only one helper at three in the morning. From the sleeping house, filled with women and me, down the idle predawn streets, out through cold farmland and into the jabbering community of the market. The woodchucks stood up from their burrows and peeked beadily at him as he bargained in tomato patches; the overfed market rats swarmed within bins of frazzled lettuce while the farmers' wives, in sheepskins, sold nickel blueberry pies to go with nickel tin cups of soup. "Good, good," he said, huffing the soup in the morning fog, cooling it with his hot breath and a breakfast gulp of pie; "How much you want for a quarter carload of lettuce? Let it stand till this afternoon, you can't even make lettuce soup, coleslaw pie."

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"I'll dump it on a restaurant."

"I'll give you cash for it. Five bucks."

"In money?"

"In bonafeed cash."

"Sold!"

"Ah your wife makes good soup," my father said, "good pie. A truly lovely lady she is."

"It's all stuff we can't sell, otherwise it rots," said the farmer.

The farmers were famished amid so much food; the people of the city went hungry; only the rats, spiders, woodchucks, silverfish, and swooping black dawn birds had no afterthoughts about the agonies of distribution in a time of waste and displeasure. Overhead, the market moon dimmed into day. All over the city of Cleveland, men who had no work sat up, switched on the light, remembered, groaned, and put out the light again. They had no work; they could try sleeping curved into the warmth of their wives' bodies. They twitched back into sleep. There was great weakness abroad in those days.

But with both hands my father wrestled the thickly evasive element of hope in the wind. He would make his business work, he would make Sam's Market pay, he would squirt the juice out of spoiling tomatoes—"MAKE GOOD SOUP!"; he wallowed with fat lust in the appetite of insecurity, showing his gold tooth for luck. "Who knows if the berries will keep over Labor Day? Does anybody know? What if there's one bad berry sneaked in underneath? Well, put in the cooler. We'll see."

No fatalist, but a gambler, he did not examine each berry personally. He merely cast his eyes over the baskets and scared them. His crocodile gaze deterred mold, stopped rot, mitigated fruit rust, and also shamed the kleptomaniacs into stealing imitation vanilla instead of the real thing.

"What you gonna do? She's sick in the head and crazy." The elegant little lady with the electric car collected bottles of flavoring the way I had collected toy soldiers. They had vanilla battles, extract wars, klepto surrenders and treaties, up and down her arms, in her lap, in her hat, and through her muff. "So I add it to her bill," my father explained, putting his head close to mine, understanding psychology, knowing that dreams must be both compromised and fulfilled, "only I call it 'Service Charge' and like that she gets the vanilla free."

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"She's a crook, shame on her, with that big house on the lake!" cried my mother.

My father let his gold tooth swing happily in mid air. He chuckled. "And that blue hair—*blue!*" There went the tooth again.

"Dad! Didn't you hear Ma?" Elsie demanded. "That's a crooked thing to do, stealing."

"I got no morality to let people steal from me, huh Elsie? That what you think?" He shook his head at the irate little knot of family perched around the table before him. "What do you think, Dan? Tell me, son."

I thought Dad had the right on his side because it was Sunday dinner and he was there. He was not always there. He was not always *there* even when he was there. But he was surely right.

"I got to check on the lights," he said. "I got to go down to the store. Don't wait up for me."

That was Sunday and sometimes Dad was there. Through the week, my sisters and I, the eldest sibling and only son, stayed late on the playground of Taft School in Lakewood, Ohio. Home was dark, silent, empty; our mother and father worked all day; the "girl," who earned five dollars a week in cash, plus room and board, was too busy with her policeman to bother much with us. The cop, whose amazing name was Patrolman Bull, left his Ford running outside while he recessed with an impatient running motor upstairs in the attic with Linda-Lou. My sisters and I climbed the garage, not to watch Officer Bull and Linda-Lou, not to spy, not to peek, though we occasionally did happen to look; but really we climbed in order to practice jumping down without breaking our arms. We did not dare break our arms during the busy season at the store, and since all seasons were crucial if not busy, we took care to leap out on the grass, extending hands, buckling knees, and rolling with parachutist grunts to a stop near the tree where we had planted dead squirrels, pennies, and acorns, though nothing grew but birch and grass and the horror stories with which I poisoned my sisters' minds.

Linda-Lou leaned from the attic window, her hair undone, shouting, "If you don't stay off the garage I'll cut you up in ten pieces."

But then she was gone, captured from behind by Officer Bull, before I could say: "Head, two arms, two legs, torso, neck, nose,

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bellybutton—that makes nine. Hey what's the tenth piece, Linda-Lou?"

I have not told any adults on Linda-Lou until just now—how she abandoned us to arm-breaking in the middle of the thirties, in the middle of the latency period—how she made Me the Boy give my sisters our graham crackers after school—but I thought that Officer Bull was sure wasting the city's gas. Linda-Lou plays Hospital, nyah-nyah! ("Shush, you," said my sister Elsie, "you want her to cut us up? Or pull down the shade so we can't see?") With fraternal gentleness I socked Elsie on the head with a rolled up Shopping News.

Linda Lou could cut me up in ten piece, I thought smugly, but my sisters only in nine. "Now let me explain *that* to you, Elsie."

"Never mind. I got other interests in life. So shut up, just because you're so smart."

When we walked to the corner like an Indian scouting party—myself in the lead and the girls allied in irregular formation down the sidewalk, the youngest dragging a lollypop from tree to tree, stippled with loose birch bark after a long block—we found the slow Nickel Plate freight which ran from Cleveland to Pittsburgh and Cleveland to Toledo. In those days the trains were covered with a crawling, clinging live weight, the weight of homeless and workless men, and we watched them with puzzlement. My sister Dolores sucked her lollypop dolorously. Like my father, were they also not secure? And if so, why didn't they smile? Why so much shifting and why did they stare at us without expression from the tops of their boxcars? And finally, why were they so—so—*interesting* to me, like Buck Rogers, Dr. Dolittle, maps, gas stations, the backs of cereal boxes, and Patrolman Bull with Linda-Lou in the attic? Other possibilities, other chances. "They want to go someplace, they're hungry," I explained to my kid sisters.

"That's not the way," said my kid sister Elsie. "They could go to the Relief."

"They're looking for *work*."

"They're bums."

"They're not—they're. . . ."

"I suppose you know everything," she said resentfully.

"Not everything, but more than a girl. Okay, maybe some of them are explorers, that's what I'm going to be. No girls allowed."

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We got home and washed where it showed in time for dinner. I was hungry because I ate no suckers (rots the teeth); an explorer needs fierce white teeth and lots of protein in case of emergencies. Mother hurried back from the store to make dinner; Dad would come in to wish us goodnight. Linda-Lou, with face rubbed raw by Officer Bull's beard, said that we had been good that afternoon and had not tried to jump off the garage. "*Really* good?" my mother insisted, wanting to be a good mother.

"Well, pretty good," said Linda-Lou, because she knew that she should be a "disciplinarian," a word which meant "strict, capable, careful, attentive, and they don't get away with shining flashlights on dead squirrels in the garage."

My father, who came in late, did not care about words. He valued things, money which buys things, the taste of chicken fat, vegetables, and fresh fruit, the pleasures of survival, and his chief clerk, named Yetta. "And you're not secure ever," he urged upon us hopefully. And he waged war with the A & P, which was beginning its mission to choke the independent merchants, and the Depression and the Black Legion and the Bund and the racketeers and the other facts of life in America in 1932, and 3 and 4 and 5, when I was eight and nine and ten and eleven years old, watchful, troubled, the eldest of his children and his only son. "Well, we've used up four thousands years of our time," he said, "and we haven't straightened things up yet. I figure there's no point in rushing. Suppose I even live to be say a hunded. How much can I accomplish, son?"

I thought he could do a great deal.

"Thank you, boy. But the last nine-ten years got to be discounted out. From ninety-four to a hundred I'll probably be weak in the head. Say ninety-five."

It was hard to imagine him rocking at the window with a dirty beard like his grandfather's, that roar of laughter squeezed to a lemony titter. So I worried about other things.

2

Troubled as I was with him, he lay more troubled than I in the close embrace of family. I was an American, spoke the language of Taft School, not his irregularly accented one, and life was too easy for me—all I had to do was grow up. But for some reason like the flooding of stars through the Milky Way or the compulsion of car-

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rots to sprout green lace in the dark (rationality does not explain it, though the lace makes seeds), he found himself at age over forty laboring like a deck sailor (a whirling sun, a bursting carrot) on behalf of a wife, a quartet of bratty kids, and why? He valued pure risk and freedom too much not to wonder what had made him a husband and father. Why this bondage? Finally I think he figured it out while slicing raw turnips into a bowl, stirring chicken fat over it, but there was a little bit of question left over which no man can ever quite figure out to its end. He ate buttered radishes for a nice change the next day, and went on figuring.

Consequently, despite all the gambler chanciness of his life in family, at the wholesale market, in the front and back rooms of the store (not to mention the basement where Yetta crooked her little finger), he was not sufficiently inoculated by the odds against luck. There have been four thousand difficult years since Solomon, so we must all be gamblers to bet on a good one next year. Next best to a good year for humanity is the private season a man creates by work and love, making things and loafing, and my father had at least a passion for work, but still he could not work all day every day. Hell, even Solomon had to relax after a hard morning dividing babies in half. He was confused by family (what means this "Parents Day in Your Elementary School"?), by wife (a woman should be loyal, but does loyalty make a woman?), even by the store because a man needs more than to sort tomatoes and crack open cases of baby-food and haul lettuce in and out of the cooler; therefore he developed a passion for cards. He gambled at the produce market and he gambled on our Sunday picnics and he gambled wherever he found an old pal with a deck in his pocket. "Hey Sam, you like a little game?"

"Sit down, sit down."

And they might pull up a couple of orange crates in the back of the store if everything were going okay up front. Let the kleptos klepto a little bit, a man has got to take his pleasure, a little bit. What's a few extra bottles of vanilla extract if you're going to live to a hundred? "Watch, watch," my father asked me, but I hated it. He urged me to watch him, but he did not care; he excluded me, as only the gambler or the passionate lover can exclude the rest of the world. He could hear the blue fuzz growing on an orange, and bring it light and air, nurse it back to health, but he could not hear the hatesong strummed on my jealous heart by a

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shuffled deck when he turned from me to it. The slap of cards, the click of coins, the contemplative grunts of the players gave him too much pleasure—ungave me him. My baleful eyes strove to corrode the neat columns of nickels, dimes, and quarters, spread like the ruins of the Parthenon in the arena of Sam's Market, shared only by my father and his friends sitting on their orange crates in the back room. Adults had pleasures! And each joy seemed to be subtracted from my proper due. I did not dare dislike the store, which stood between the misery of the Nickel Plate freights and a family in the Depression, but I could dare to hate rummy and poker and pinochle, which stood between my father and me when I wanted him to throw me a ball or take me fishing, as the "American" fathers did. "Don't go away, watch," he said as he felt my evil face upon him. "Here's a quarter, you hold the money. Here, watch, you'll learn the game."

Didn't I know what a bribe was?

"Here, son, you be my banker. Keep the quarter. Sit already, sit, you're making me nervous."

Yes, I knew what a bribe was. But maybe after a while—

I learned the game, I took the quarter, I sat. But I was wrong to wait. This was not like Yetta; he did not tire of it. A woman weighing nearly two hundred pounds talks babytalk; it's cute; etcetera. Then a man thinks of loyalty, his own back porch, and the wife who listened so carefully and stroked his head when he made his confession that he felt sad and lonely sometimes, what the Americans call blue, and he needed someone to love him. And so fare thee well to Yetta and her bellyshaking ways. But cards? No. The more a man plays, the more he wants to play, unless his reddening eyes blank out and he topples from the orange crate. Hardly likely before the age of ninety-six. Before he tired of cards I was sleeping on the grass (picnic) or across a stack of Libby's canned peaches (back of the store), dreaming disasters to this father who so sweetly, fluently, smilingly departed. He left me into the game. There were Italian fathers at the picnic grounds who drank wine and wrestled with their sons while mamamia rolled the spaghetti; there were men who worked for my father, squirrelled away cans of meat in their pockets when they thought he wasn't looking, and went on picnics with us, and they hung about their babies with feminine, adoring gaze.

I didn't mind work and Yetta: that's fatality. But rummy, poker,

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blackjack, and pinochle gave me my model for all the craven yearning of unrequited love. Having wished him ruin, I then performed magic—hopping on one foot without falling while spelling "Kate Smith" backwards, counting to five hundred by threes—until, at last, my father turned to his eldest child and said, "Let's do something, son."

Here is the model of the gleeful yearning of requited love! He spoke, he smiled, he winked, he joined me in my spaceship rocketing through Kate Smith backwards!

Often, however, before my magic could take effect, Mother was after him. She had small complaints, such as Yetta, who was too good a clerk to be let go, but had lured him into the basement to discuss the problems of a healthy widow. Such as: What to do about the screens in the fall? Where to put her vocabulary of babytalk? How to approach the secret of existence through the garden of life when a girl married a man with a weak heart he kept from everyone, just wore shiny clothes and drove up in a roadster? Well, even Solomon would take his time over that one, and my father concentrated hard on Yetta until he discovered the basic truth: You can leave the screens up all winter. If they rust, buy new ones or learn to swat the flies.

By that time Mother had hurt feelings. And she did not let him forget it, because though she was loyal, she was also verbal. He was guilty of spilling something like love into Yetta. Mother's heart, she explained in her own way, was breaking.

"Can I help it if I'm a working man?" he roared, plunging into thickets of partial relevance. (Verdict: Guilty as Nagged.) "If I need my strength to live and so I got a lot of it? Look, see that fist? How many crates I smashed open with it, how many fights I had on the market with the anti-semites, how many bushels of potatoes I lifted with my bare hands?"

"How many, Sam?" my mother asked, suddenly curious.

"I can't afford to get sleepy. I got responsibilities. You think life asks me questions? It gives me answers, that's all, and who told Linda-Lou she could keep her cossack here all night? I need a big cop jumping around on the ceiling all night when I got to sleep fast, get my eight hours in five? If you prick me, I'll bleed. And if you make googoo eyes at me—"

"You'll what, American?" demanded my mother.

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"So enough nagging! *Genugh!* I heard enough already!"

Brooding beneath lidded eyes, Mother turned away with her argument brilliantly organized in her head. He had no answer to her dream argument, but life is not a dream, and when she started to inject an appetizer of pickled reality into it, he answered back, loud. He could not count on the pickle, creamed, smoked, devilled, and diced forms, but when it came to reality, he had the main course on his side.

"And besides, I've stopped," he said contritely, with eyes like my mother's—hooded by dreaming of that fair fat Yetta spread like a teeming bin of fruit across the level stacks of canned goods in the basement of the store, her apron parted, her skirt pulled up, my father discussing.

Mother and Dad looked at each other. He put out his arms. They kissed. For the moment, history cleared out of their eyes and there was only the pure embrace of separate hopes, opposing dreams, and a joined intention. But the language was different. And the hopes. And dreams. And the way of traveling through the four thousand and more years of reality.

And then they kissed again. They smiled upon each other from the small space between, and my father's gold tooth shone like a mote in the air. And then they went to the back of the house to kiss a third time.

Naturally, though they could abolish history in the clasp of love, they could not get rid of Aunt Anna. History accepts fact, but Anna demanded explanations. She planted her ankles, all five of them, in front of the stove and said, "Nu?"

Mother felt that "Sam's trouble—he got too much energy—is—"

"What? What trouble? When? Why are you letting the kasha get so brown? *What is Sam's trouble?*" asked omnipresent, omniscient, omniankled and many-nosed Aunt Anna, for whom everyone behaved or else. (Or else what? She frowned. The garden became a desert. The kasha got too brown.)

Mother dropped the pan into the sink and said, "He got too much energy."

Aunt Anna became all beak. "You mean Yetta, that Divorcee, how he's been carrying on?"

"She's only a widow. He don't anymore. He promised."

Anna sniffed.

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"He keeps his promises, Anna. Why are you sniffing?"

Aunt Anna snorted. "Acts like a dee-vor-see to me. Where does he take her? On the cans?"

"You got a cold tongue, Anna."

"On the cans in the basement of the store? On the babyfood? On the peas and carrots?"

"He handles only Libby's succotash, the very best U. S. Grade A-1," my mother said proudly. "At least he took her on the cans, he didn't spend our money on hotel rooms."

"Or he could go to her house," Aunt Anna pointed out, still sniffing.

Mother was scandalized. "Her house? The neighbors should see his truck? What's the matter, you crazy?"

"Well," said Justice Brandeis my aunt, "he's a shtunk sometimes, if you ask me, but maybe he's a good provider."

"He's a good man," said my mother, "a good provider. And he keeps a clean scalp—you know he shampoos twice a week? And a good heart—a good heart, Anna."

Sniff, snuffle, snort.

"Just he gets nervous sometimes, his way. You want some kasha and mushrooms?"

"It's too brown," said my aunt, "it makes me drip, my nose runs, and I got to go home and make Morris his supper. He don't like the kasha so brown. He goes crazy missing me if I'm not there. That man, hm, snt, koff, he *can't do anything without me.*"

"He's a trial to you," my mother commented.

"Hm," said Aunt Anna. "Well, don't let it aggravate you. They say aggravation is bad for the teeth, and what happened to all the calcium already? You're a young woman, Sadie."

"Four children."

"Who asked you to be a old-country mama?"

"Sam never *asked* me, Anna."

"Byebye," said my aunt chipperly.

My mother stood over the stove, stirring with a wooden spoon and letting her tears fall upon the too-brown kasha. She had fought Anna to a draw, but still there were those tears left over. Four children and all that calcium weren't enough for him? He needed Yetta too? Is all of life just sacrifice and bitter memories?

Oh-oh! Here's Pop, who likes to salt the kasha himself. Dry the face quick!

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3

Dad tiptoed into my room and rested his hand lightly upon my cheek. I flew straight up out of my dream. It was seven o'clock on a Sunday morning in November and he lifted a finger to his mouth. *Shh.* He was wearing pants and an undershirt, needed a shave, grinned and winked at me. He was whispering. "Son, you want to do something?"

I was dressed and unwashed with the speed of one of his best kleptomaniacs getting a bottle of vanilla extract into general circulation. Yes, I wanted to do something.

What we did on these occasions of doing something together was to go to the Russian bath on Sunday morning, before the rest of the family mobilized for breakfast, sneaking down the driveway in the old Peerless before my sisters could whine about being left out, conspiring against mother and babies, just the two of us men. On Sunday mornings, when the suburb of Lakewood showed its depression mothers in veils and its daughters in tulle, congested before the Christian Science church, the Catholic churches, the various churches, we drove miles into Cleveland, to West Sixth Street, just above the industrial flats, Republic Steel and Glidden Paints, where the Bath drew its clientele of old country loiterers. Our Peerless, shot through with smells of apples, lettuce, and grapes (it was used for deliveries on Saturday), rattled down Clifton Boulevard, along Lake Erie with its mansions and captain's towers, across the keeled-over city which was frozen by autumn rain and bank failures, miseries and hopelessness. Even on Sunday there were families lined up for giveaway baskets; Hungarian and Slavic men gathered on street corners to beat their arms against their overcoats and assess the blame and curse Hoover and the foolish message from nobody which had brought them to this frosty America. The breath issued from their mouths in short angry white puffs, like Indian smoke signals without the fire.

"You know why we're called Gold?" my father asked me on my eleventh birthday. "At Immigration they couldn't pronounce my real name, so I thought: Call myself by the meaning of America. Gold in the streets! Me I picked it!" Furious, conned, delighted laughter: "Gold! Hah!"

He meant Smith or Jones, I now realize; he meant to be known as an American and to create himself pure, out of the streets of

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this country, Sam Gold the Smith-Jones American, with no history, heaven, or hell but his desire and hope for the earth of Cleveland and the truck farms nearby.

"Voogaltair," he said, "remember it. That was my name. Teach it to your kits—I was wrong. A kit should know his real name. *Woo-gal-tair.*"

But when they ask, "Who's there?" how could I answer "Voogaltair"? Gold was the only name I ever needed to answer with. My father had chosen it as he chose me, and I would keep it and not worry it too much. As Sir Toby Belch said, "Care's an enemy to life," and he also had a funny name. Let Gold be your good friend, America; peace be with you, be with you peace.

We rattled through these Sunday streets to sweat it out—pestilence of boyhood, pestilence of fatherhood—at the Cuyahoga Russki Shvitz on West Sixth Street, near the Public Square of Cleveland, just below the Russian Orthodox Church where an ancient, bearded, hunchbacked priest prayed under onion domes, a gift from the last tsar, for relief from plague, famine, earthquake, volcano, alcoholism, and the perils of civil war. And doubt. And depair. And the insecurity of that and all times surrounding the Cuyahoga Russki Shvitz (Indian, Russian, and Yiddish words, in that order). *Gospodi pomilu, Gospodi pomilu!* Sometimes we could feel the old priest's ferocious doublebass vibrating in the looser bones of our heads as we walked up the steps past the sign which said, "Towels Soap Etcetera One Price To All." My father always paused, cocked an ear toward the church, and said the same thing: "Nice. I heard Chaliapin once. A great man." The priest was chanting, flashing his garments, swinging chains and incense while his flock received their blessing. Overdressed, packed together, they stood with reddened eyes early on Sunday morning and wept for dread, for beauty. My father sighed and nudged me along. "Let's get into the steamroom—get this wool off our backs, what do you say?"

Lord save us, Lord save us! We fled inside from the perils of civil strife.

"Sam," my mother had remarked a few nights before, "the dentist says he'll try some more fillings—then it's a bridge."

"Okay."

"Expensive job for first-class bridge dentistry."

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"Okay, you got to have teeth."

"They say it's aggravation rots the teeth."

"Who said?"

"Scientists. Anna."

He filled himself with air like a lizard at storm time, and then let it out with a hiss, generously not exploding. "And Anna the Scientist says I aggravate you, yes?"

"Well, it's just my teeth are no good. Facts is facts."

My father picked up the paper and put his head behind it. "I'm sorry," he said, "I invented Hitler, the bank closings, I organized the Depression and the Black Legion, I'm sorry I—"

"Sam?" Timidly, tenderly, brokenly.

Muffled from behind the paper, distant and wornout, thus hiding his face, he said, "Yetta was a big mistake. I'm sorry. She made me crazy in the store nights, Sadie—*the boy's listening.*"

"What does he understand?" my mother assured him as I snaked my tongue through my teeth, looking for aggravations. I wiggled like a fish not caught but hypnotized onto the hook.

My father heaved a sigh up from his pockets. "Here, kotchka, read the paper anyway."

"It aggravates me," said my mother.

Supersophisticated, I had understood all and explained it to my sister Elsie. "Maybe she has this mad passion for the dentist?" Elsie asked.

"Aw, Ma wouldn't do that."

"But I think she's beautiful, very lovely," said Elsie, "you know? For an old lady?"

"Don't tell the kids."

She looked at me as if I were crazy. Do you think a girl ten years old, going on thirteen, American-born, with a Cleveland accent—the west side of town, Lakewood, in fact—didn't know enough to keep her blab flapped down? She was contemptuous of my aggravating male lack of consideration, and turned on me in chill snubbery. All right, Okay. But then how did Shirl and Dolores find out about Ma and the dentist? I was sick of Elsie.

Freed of women on the steps of the Bath, in the shadow of the tsar's onion domes, with the priest's doublebass swelling resonantly between his flock and the perils of life in Cleveland, my father asked me, "You got the deck?"

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"You said you wouldn't play cards today."

"You're right! Hokay! And if I got to play, Saul Spitz always brings a deck."

4

What a joy to exclude women—my mother and sisters—from the naked and sweating world of the baths! Among the nations of men finally at age eleven, I was my father's son, lounging at my ease within a maze of rooms devoted to skin pleasure, lung relish, intense getting-out-the-kinks and dozing and hilarity on rusty chairs.

"Looks just like you, Sam!"

"Why shouldn't he? But he'll be taller—eats American food."

Swaddled by towels, these giants, folds of belly and folds of terrycloth, stood about in solemn contemplation of me. A hero with a changemaker on his belt—Saul Spitz the newsvendor—took off his great weight of belt; truckdrivers and carpenters with Glidden Paints caps flung them into their lockers, union buttons clicking against metal; businessmen strolled elegantly on their bunions, heaved off their shoes, examined their corns and bruises—"too much standing, kid"—and went into the steamroom with a pumice to give their dead flesh the slip. Frazzled bozos with clogged pores, backwatering sinuses, and fishy scalps came to renew their youth. Spindly shanks and flopping thighs looked for grace and unburdening by steam, salt, switching, stretching, alcohol, and massage. Distracted gaze, constipation, and kidney stones, galled by experience and worn down by the Depression and nagged a little at home, picked up fresh towels and soap, sat amid geysers of steam on the highest and hottest shelf they could bear, sighed and groaned, brushed teeth with finger, went from hot into steamroom, steamroom into hot into showers, back and forth, till thoroughly cleansed. Then shower again. Then the towels in a heap with abundant dirty towels, and fresh white ones, white as fur, for final sitting, gossiping, card-playing, or dozing.

Closed-in, smiling, skin-proud men, freed of family and love, at least for the moment, amiable and hulking on stools, towelled heavily, one was named Morris, another Gabe, another Simon; they needed no name or occupation in this place. They were relieved and loved to sigh. Though they talked with each other, the talk

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was an expression of their general sensual blitheness, not a means of communication and only slightly an expression of more than this pleasure: a sigh, a grunt, a stretch, a yawn; a scratch of toes, a gargle, a relieved rumble of gut. "I got good feet for my age," my father said, "not a callus, look!"

"I see," Saul Spitz mournfully observed, and grudgingly added, "I stand on them all day."

"So I don't stand?"

"And naturally they get sore, the newspaper business."

"It's in my family. Danny got good feet. My daughters, they got bad feet, like my wife. And they got it without standing—maybe just from telephoning, using the telephone all the time, Elsie got calluses on the bunions."

"All right, Sam, maybe your side of the family is good for feet."

My father called me over with an imperative hooking gesture. "Show Saul Spitz your bottoms." I must have looked surprised. "Of your feet, mug. Here,"—and he grabbed and he kept me hopping.

The near-sighted newsvender bent and squinted at my big toes, between the toes, the ankle, instep, and heel, and then straightened up. "Sam," he said, "I got to hand it to you."

My father smiled. "I wouldn't make it up," he remarked contentedly, showing that tooth which sang like a bird in his head, and then became kind all at once. "But Saul, I hear your boy is good in school. My Sadie heard it from your Ida."

Izzie Rabinowitz, frowning and vain, bent nearly double on a stool, put his tongue sideways and breathed through his mouth in short absorbed wheezes, plucking out the gray ones among his pubic hairs. "Ouch! ouch! outch!" he sighed, successful at last, and straightened up. It was also a trial to have deviant vision. "Not as young as I used to be," he remarked, summing up the experience.

"So now you feel younger?" my father asked. "All one color? Red?"

Izzie shrugged. "You got to please the ladies, youth they like."

"*They like,*" said my father, knowing that this was not what they valued. "Pluck, pal, but there is other ways to step up strong."

"What you mean by that?"

"Bifocals. Hair dye. Chutzpah, what you think?" (Chutzpah means hubris, that mad pride which led so many Greeks into

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trouble by assuring them that 20-20 vision and pubic hair all of one color do not make the man.) Izzie Rabinowitz bowed his head and turned "with quiet dignity" to wash his feet with a long-handled brush.

Stately giants in repose, the men at the Bath ate, drank, sweated, steamed, and bathed, lounging swathed in towels like monuments waiting to be dedicated or sitting thinkerishly on stools. And their buttocks! Some of them were stringy and lean; some ripe, pale, and knobby as basement roots, paired sweet potatoes; but mostly they had fine fat ones, storing up a history of corned beef, rye bread, pickles, and hot mustard, yearning for Sunday. Their buttocks were striations of meat, flesh like aging oak with concentric rings which each stood for the years, patience, climbing, tension, and romping joys of thickly buttocked men; and on Sunday morning at the baths, the release of gut was pure pleasure—all the time in the universe when they desired to squat, and the Sunday paper to pass the time between spasms of relief, and showers and soap for perfect cleanliness afterwards, and then abandon in the pool, doing a slow breast stroke, blowing water. Ah, a man hurries all week, clipping short his rightful rump joy while the telephone shrills outside, while his children or his wife bang or holler at the door; but on Sunday, Sunday at the Russian Bath! Rows of private booths! No pants to tangle in ankles and keep off the floor! Freedom of knees and unfinicky noses! And most of all, time, blessed time! The noble brow of Izzie Rabinowitz took its rest, and Saul Spitz the Newsvendor's capacious paunch against which so many nickels had tinkled, and Jake Berman's fierce jut and sprinkle of hair—belly, back, behind, and tangle of ribald commercial eyebrows. And my father, more muscular than the others, with thick hocks and thick control beneath the pink, salt-bruised flesh, moved in the center of my vision.

The steamroom was the sanctum sanctorum, of course, the holy of holies for halvah and chalah eaters, the best palace of delight, an impregnable citadel of tile. There were also equipment and appurtenances beautiful in their hot, wet, logical simplicity. Wooden shelves were arranged in tiers along the walls, each level hotter than the one below: a man climbed, dangled, accepted what he could bear. There were nozzles, hoses, radiators, and if you wanted more steam, you turned the water on the radiator and it flew forth

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like bee droplets, buzzing and fighting in the air. Occasionally one of the Ukrainian attendants, naked but for his handlebar mustache, brought in a bucket of pine water and dashed it against the radiator and a pouff of piney steam broke into our lungs. Men lay blinking on their shelves, gasping with pleasure, or stood yelling confidences at each other in the sea roar, and just waited for the good to come to them. Towels, soap, water, hot water, hotter water, gravelly salt for rubbing, chatter, laughter, and hairy companionship in the strain and ease of this invented weather—they dreamed of it during their bitter week of the Depression autumn in Cleveland.

"Harry Hopkins says—"

"You mean Harry Ickes."

"It's Harold, and I mean General Johnson, too, so listen!"

"Why should I, Sam? Let's get some more steam!"

They boarded the cloud of steam like amiably quarrelsome fat angels, bellowing at each other for joy in lungpower amid the roar of fantastic plumbing. Beneath us, the tangled pipes gave their all, and beneath the pipes, another Ukrainian heaped enough coal into the furnace to send us skimming across Lake Erie to Canada, parting and drying up the waters to our stern. Skinny and prideful, I moved underfoot in the steamroom like a drenched rat, learning the ways of men. Just as a few years later a uniform would reduce me—or raise me—to be a man exactly like all other men, except courageous and cowardly, evasive or direct, foolish in life or getting through, so the uniform of nakedness removed all these men from the pride, disgrace, and works of their days. In my child's eyes they were very much alike—swollen sex, hanging gourds, purplish veins, creased bellies—and to them I was different: a child. "Sam's kid! Lookit the kid, little Sam, he's learning the steamroom! Sam Gold's boy! You making out, kid, with all you got is that pinkie of yours?"

I hid myself in shame and giggled. I was only a child, agreed for the sake of peace, but I was the only child whose father trusted him here. And Dad said I was no bother to him, not too much anyway, as briskly, grunting, enjoying, he rubbed salt into his velvety pelt until the skin beneath flamed pink, glowed. And therefore I was a gladiator. I sloshed behind through the drain that lay at dead center of the tiled steamroom, and then climbed the hot and hotter wooden shelves along the wall. Dad pushed me out when he thought I might get dizzy, and once when I felt abruptly soft and

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faint, he carried me into the lockerroom and made me drink salt water. Hot and sulky, I tasted blood on my tongue. I thought I looked like a man and smiled at my father.

"You okay, son? It can happen to anybody."

"I want to go back."

"No, no, no, it ain't no dare, the steamroom. Next Sunday some more, son."

I was learning to take heat, and though white and hairless, to have an appetite for foaming steam. I waited for Dad while he returned to wash down the salt crystals from his inflamed chest and flanks.

In the back rooms, beyond the arena where these businessmen took their ration of steam and salt, there were dark cubicles where mysterious muscled recluses provided the pleasures of massage to a different, younger group of plump *Amerikantsi*. These dandies and sissies composed another society. We never more than nodded to them at the entrance. They never paused to listen to the Russian priest's chant. They had never heard the voice of Chaliapin, Lord save them.

5

"Now," my father said on this particular Sunday morning of which I speak, "you okay? So I'll play a little cards maybe."

"But breakfast!" I wailed.

"But breakfast, sure—*after* breakfast." He laid his heavy arm across my shoulders. "You think we wouldn't have breakfast first?"

In a room like a huge restaurant kitchen reigned the smiling and sweating Ukrainian cook, wearing nothing but white duck pants and a mat of skin hardened by flying fat, healed-over blisters, calluses, more flying fat. He cooked at an open coal stove and handed platters of breakfast meats to the happily depleted men after their immersion in vapor. These were not men who did exercises: their lives gave them plenty; but having reclined amid the waters and hallooed at each other and rubbed salt onto their flesh, they then emerged, hung with towels, to eat hearty of liver and onions or steak and onions, served on worn, grooved, wooden platters with pink juices running in the grooves. Ravenous, hilarious, clean, lightened of their burdens, they said, "Have some more smothered onions, kid."

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"I got my own," I said.

"He got his own," said my father, "leave him alone."

"He's just a pinkie off you, Sam!" cried the newsvendor. "Haw, haw."

"I got me a nice pinkie," my father said, touching my head, and I blushed with gratitude and love. Escaped from the women of our house and the world, we were father and son alone in a man's place, stripped to our skin, tender with each other in our inexperienced ways while the world spun its strange course outside. There was no justice, Germany was burning with hatred, the Black Legion was mumbling its curses in the countryside about Cleveland, but here on West Sixth Street we could eat liver rare, plus smothered onions, and smile handsomely at each other. Since he was a fat king, I was a skinny prince. As much as I knew how at that age, I blessed my father.

"More onions? More liver? Better than at home, hey kid?"

"Yes."

"Just seems that way! Something about sweating! Salt and liver taste good, and those onions!"

And something about home, too, I now believe I then thought.

Having eaten, the men flung away their forks and knives, left the dripping platters, and went to the cardtables. Sex bulged under their swaths of towels, their swaddles of terrycloth. They talked business and politics, they sighed, they said, "Ai-yeah, what can you do?" Then they settled down to cards.

I wandered disconsolately, found by my father, then losing him to the game. After the joy of steam and food, I was dismally abandoned. I felt as dull-eyed as the hoboes on the Nickel Plate, going noplace between Toledo and Cleveland. I stood by his side, not looking at the cards, forgotten as he sank once more into the game. I knew too much to nag him for attention. I stood there hopelessly, knowing that it was useless, but with a child's cunning, seeking to shame him by my loitering. He shook his head and pursed his lips and was rid of me. I went wandering again through the corridors and lockerrooms and back to the empty kitchen. Where we had steamed, there was only a smell and strangers. Where we had eaten, there was only dishwashing and cold grease. I was alone.

Even one of my sisters, even my mother would have been welcome company to me now, at eleven o'clock on a Sunday morning

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in the Russian bath. This was defeat: to be lonely in my father's presence, thinking of a woman and of girls.

An hour passed. I thought of getting dressed and going to sit outside, but the frosty morning had given way to a rainy gray November afternoon. I poked my head into the back corridor where the Amerikantsi went for their massage, but the cook found me and grabbed my ear. "Hey! That not for you!" he said. "Your papa know you poke nose back here?"

"My father's playing cards."

"Go be with your father, Little Sam."

Pouting and dismal and dim, I obeyed orders. Maybe this time he'll be finished, I thought, and swore to myself, as I had many times before at this hour: *I won't come back here again.* But each time, each Sunday morning, I remembered the fresh, secret early morning ride in the Peerless, the steamroom and the pine vapors and the jokes, my father's pride in me, the liver and onions and wooden platters; and I knew that each time I would be teased once more by hope against betrayal by the cards which took my father from me.

I wandered back, stepping only on the cracks.

The game was different; I saw it at once as I entered the room. The four players were looking at each other's hands and chortling. The men were different, the towels had fallen agape, and their faces were flushed. They were not dealing; they were sharing the cards. I came up quietly, and just as during the game, they did not see me. I stood by my father and looked at the pack of photographs spread about on the table.

There were pictures of women, women and men, women and whips and men, women and leather thongs and shoes and men, women stooping and grinning and very false-serious. It seems to me that I must have known what all this meant without any thought at all; I had learned on the playground and in the alleys; but I had never joined my father with these matters. I stood for a moment in stricken shame.

Someone said, "Hey Sam! Your boy's here!"

With that word I burst into rage. Naked, I threw myself on the table and it collapsed beneath my weight; shrieking, I grabbed the cards in my fists and flung them about; I did a dance of craziness, a screaming tantrum of protest against so much betrayal until sud-

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denly my face took my father's slap and I fell sobbing to the tile floor. He picked me up in his arms. The other men had turned away. The cards lay soggy and abandoned on the wet tiles, no one finding joy in them now.

Cradled in my father's arms, my skinny, convulsed legs dangling, I suddenly saw his face, heavy and white, come into focus above me. He was weeping. "Kit," he said. "Son. Son."

I tried to flood out the tears once more so that I would not have to see his face. But only dry sobs; and as I lay in his arms, we gazed into each other's eyes.

"You don't understand now," he said. "It's not so terrible, son. It's just—nothing is enough like it already is for most men. Nothing is enough."

I think I remember cigar smoke rising from the group of men huddled together against the wall on the other side of the room. They were murmuring and smoking.

"Son?" my father asked, as if this were a question.

"Let me down," I said. He paused, and then swung me easily to the floor. I felt the tiles on my feet. He waited for me to make the next move.

"Son?"

The cards still floated in the puddles and stains on the floor. There was a smell of wetness and cigars. All these men who gathered on Sunday morning in the Russian Bath for a quiet time together stood silent, waiting for me to rise to pity for their loneliness—me, at age eleven.

No, I could not feel pity. But abruptly my eyes swam in a flood of the knowledge which rises from pain, released from my prison of self-regard (many times released, many times imprisoned).

"Son, would you like to do something now?" my father asked.

"Yes. Let's go home."

The company of men is not enough, I think I meant to say; let us now turn toward women.

We went out into the gray November afternoon, my father holding my hand, and he paused to listen for the service from the Russian Orthodox church. Silence. He shook his head. "Guess they've stopped already," he said. "Hurry up, we got to get you where it's warm. I bet your pores are still open."

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FREDERICK SEIDEL

The Sickness

1

The way a child's hands stare through glass
under the frost, pining so much
they lag behind the child, they pass
their two hours, patients and their visitors, and touch
each other's hands with all their love.
The huge scarred Chinaman, a yellow boxing glove
(his neck and head), spreads out his wife's left hand

just so, and strokes her wedding-band,
a lion lapping at a thorn
in his own paw. Alone, I stand
by the wall scribbling with my finger Pound's forlorn
hymn, "What thou lovest well remains . . .
What thou lov'st well. . . ." They don't allow us pens. Bleak
grains
of sunlight cross the floor as the sun leans

inside the tall barred windowscreens,
while the river escalates downtown
on flattening steps of foam. "I cleans
yo hans, I cleans you fresh blue sunshine," Chas, his brown
and blue eyes tilting madly, sings.
The gulls, their own white tracers, dip through spumey rings
for rubbers, fish and rubbish. Pudgy squabs

peck the yard's pebbles. Each head bobs
like a cork floater. *From these stones*
give us our bread, Lord, each craw sobs.
"Shall not be reft from thee"—rose lips and flinty crones'
lips peck their husbands' lips, the priest
who came is going. Eyes and tongues and ears, like yeast,
swell through their sockets as the studded door

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opens and buzzes closed for more
long hours. When washday's down the drain
comes Tuesday, two o'clock to four,
though some of them won't come if there's a washday rain.
Priests, girls run down, the hours just run.
No heliotrope, I watch that dead gray door. The sun,
the flexed life-dealing sun's too strong, the sun.

2

Bottlegreen grass in Central Park,
the early light streams. Lying like
a lover near her boy, a girl,
Pre-Raphaelite in profile, pearl-
smooth lips, nose and brow, and the passive
long eyelids and lashes of Melancholy pensive—
and when she rises and walks away
a borzoi and its soft sashay
on slender white paws comes to mind.
We lay there like a heart, our mind
off to our right the blue lagoon,
free still of sailboats, just free of the moon,
our south, the red and brown brick zoo.
But that was then. This now is Bellevue,
and God knows where the girl is, a ruined
wax mask, waist-down a shiftless hot wind.
Dear heart, those times that were sweet milk
for our pale bones, and in the clock spun silk
for our chapped skin, like dice have scattered.
I'm like that lady-killer Bluebeard,
dead, but to my last wife's dust,
all Bellevue-blue obsessive trust,
repeating like an old blind cock,
"Dear heart, the light streams down on Central Park."
It's not my mind. Shouldn't that show
have gorgeous Desdemona snow
Othello, ax him and then fly,
black circles under each blue eye,
my dear? And our Miss Liberty,

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lounging beside the door, our trusty p.t.,
will she be had, will she give in
to the Red Bear and live in sin
and then Red China break the door?
Divorce, adultery and war
thrive. "Let live, sleep late, leave the lark
to cry, The light streams down on Central Park,"
you'd say—but some say, "Miss the slut
a little while, poor soiled girl." What
else is there but—to live—to care
for something flashy made of air
and lose it to the wind, and sue
for breach of promise with faked death in Bellevue
or the sex pen? But I don't know.
The smile that builds the cretin's brow,
the tenderness one gives and gets,
and lives off, with stale cigarettes,
and what old people keep of fleece
and breath, aren't they some help? They give some peace.
One guy here said, "Don't play dead, die."
But others try life, try dope, try
the fairy bars, join the Reserves,
or take the wife their life deserves.
He said, "We're locked together like rhymes,
us and our loved-ones, in bad times,
and the live whole halves of our heart
shall, wind or bomb, be smithereened apart."

3

Like a gray cat tied to the tarred stump of a tree
at night, the hall hides, tries its length, slinks back. It climbs
piles of back stairs down from the dark street. Finally
the kitchen. Just to waste the steak here would take lifetimes!
there's that much, and all much too gamey to be good—
blue tons braised, baked, broiled or basted violet. Pie-eyed
waiters dump it on castered slabs they wheel inside
the banquet room. They breathe here. No one else could.
The air's close as wet wool. On the last door's a hide,

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white once, now orange, lettered GRAEFIN SEIDE'S PRIDE.
In the room jet columns lace the floor and balcony
from which low music flickers on the parquet wood
through massive fuming candelabra. Easily
a dozen colored footmen hum along the walls,
among them grown men dressed like Phillip Morris boys,
smooth moon-faced fairies, serving trays to him. He stalls
over each choice until—this the fat king enjoys—
their hands start shaking, picks some favorite *saignant* dish
he's had prepared, and motioning away the rest,
pokes it, and slurps his fingertip, and smiles—"Deeelish . . .
deeelicious!" Sweating, finished, he sheds his green vest
and rolls his saffron blouse's sleeves up to his armpits—
slowly, because of the stiff spangles—even so,
they slip out of his fat gold fingers—and just sits,
just strokes his lapdog, slowly—no hour hand's so slow.
The candles huddle, soughing, in the brain-gray gloom,
in their pale light. His gold knuckles gleam. Not a sound.

Don't make a sound, here's your last chance. Take it
and run for it down the wrong hallway, the one
that's never used, and don't look back. You've missed
the worst of it just barely. You *have* to know!
is what you're going to say. Well, things like a girl
exposing herself in various poses to
a vast steel machine and its little red eye
which stares and stares and never goes off. Enough?
Behind her, behind where she spreads herself out
nude in her stockings and black garter belt
on the Persian carpet, its pile the silencer,
is another huge heavy machine, this one
entirely hooded in black leather except for
its appendages, mantis-like chrome arms
which operate on her face with silver knives,
finally leaving only her eyes. Enough?
Well, like the room where priests walk on the ceiling,
nuns on the floor, looking for each other
in pitch-darkness with great blind eyes on stalks,
like dandelions. With their charcoals they scrawl

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messages they of course can't know the others
can't see, all being deaf-mutes, on the damp walls.
Enough? One last thing, then, and the worst.
In about an hour the Royal Servitors
of the Commode come in and fold a silk screen,
tall and lavender, with various seals
and names sewn into it, like Eurydice, Gandhi,
Nietzsche, Troilus, Dulles, Pola Negri
and others—they fold this screen around the fat king,
who is seated. Under it you can see
the pairs of slippers, the Servitors' at attention
on triangle bases. Then they emerge, the screen
is folded back, and in the pot are gold bees,
honeybees, millions of them, which rise and join
the millions and millions of them on the ceiling
that you thought were highly overwrought
gold work. They made the low music that you heard.
No one eats honey here—it drips down the walls
and columns, it hangs in the air—so it happens
sometimes that a live man is selected
for his weakness to come and gorge, to swell up
half dead on the sweetness that famishes,
and all the while he dies the honeybees feed
on him with their singers, until in ecstasy
he does die. You were lured here for this purpose.
Get outside. It is morning on Eighty-sixth Street
where you live. The painted clock outside
the jeweler's window happens to have the right time,
6 o'clock. A girl with crooked stockings
walks on the feet of a goddess to the bus stop.
An opening window flashes light out over
the street like a big white bird. Coming home
after a rainy night in Central Park
behind his old friend, his old suffering mare,
a horse-cab driver, looking straight ahead,
smiles quietly, just because it is morning.

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MAXINE W. KUMIN

Morning Swim

Into my empty head there come
A cotton beach, a dock wherefrom

I set out, oily and nude
Through mist, in chilly solitude.

There was no line, no roof or floor
To tell the water from the air.

Night fog thick as terry cloth
Closed me in its fuzzy growth.

I hung my bathrobe on two pegs.
I took the lake between my legs.

Invaded and invader, I
Went overhand on that flat sky.

Fish twitched beneath me, quick and tame.
In their green zone they sang my name

And in the rhythm of the swim
I hummed a two-four-time slow hymn.

I hummed *Abide With Me*. The beat
Rose in the fine thrash of my feet,

Rose in the bubbles I put out
Slantwise, trailing through my mouth.

My bones drank water; water fell
Through all my doors. I was the well

That fed the lake that met my sea
In which I sang *Abide With Me*.

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In That Land

Hungry for oysters to suck down with gin,
we go at sunset and low water when
the sea returns our backyard, scrubbed but stinking.
In an abundance of dying, crabs bleach out
their whiskery legs, and fields of minnows
stiffen like orderly sardines, their eyes intact.
The shell of a horseshoe crab is the Kaiser's helmet
I swing by the tail till the natural glue lets go.

We walk in the shallows where stones become oysters
older than stones, grown in on each other
lip over lip, greasy with algae, to cover
the eyeball we eat. Until we unlock the joints,
alive. Alive, perhaps, as we swallow.
Now they belong to the stones. Standing on stones,
we are the oyster killers who live in a world
of sundown and gin and shellfish within our means.

At night the sound of water rocks our bed.
The chowder moon is a bowl of milky clams.
And as we lie in a tangle of stars and pines,
hardshell beetles blunder against the screen,
roll on their backs and die, cracking like popcorn.

By the hall light that pulls the June bugs down,
I see your legs walk past me to the window.
Your buttocks are two moons tipped on their cradles.
Your back, a new tent arching. Snakes sit
in the bulge of your arms, their tongues your elbows.

The big bed smells of salt. When you come back,
I move from my own cocoon to wind in yours.
Inside my eyes I count the shapes of shells:
the armor of broken beetles, mismatched halves
of oysters, the calico tops of scalded crabs,
and fishes' eyes, a thousand empty windows.
I will not count our own small gift of bones.
We hold ourselves in one world at a time.

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Sisyphus

When I was young and full of shame
I knew a legless man who came

inside a little cart, inchmeal,
flatirons on his hands, downhill.

Under the railroad bridge his chant
singsonged all day *repent, repent*

for Jesus. On the way to school
I spoke to him to save my soul

and coming back, he made me stop
to count the nickels in his cap.

Eyes level with my petticoat
he whined to me. I smelled his goat-

smell, randy, thick, as brown as blood.
I did the only thing I could.

I wheeled my master up the hill.
I rolled him up as he sat still.

Up past the sisters of Saint Joe
I pushed my stone so God would know.

And he, who could not genuflect
on seamy stumps, stitched his respect

with fingers in the air. He called
me a perfect Christian child.

One day I said I was a Jew.
I wished I had. I wanted to.

The basket man is gone; the stone
I push up hill is all my own.

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The Ear

It is a very old story my Mafia-Tony tells
which begins in the North End with a drunken father
and eleven sisters and brothers, and swells

to the night of the razor which carried away
cleanly, the spiral top half of his right ear.
He is my fruit man. I call here each Saturday.

I see the Christopher medal that sits
in the black mat of his chest. I inspect
the bananas, the melons and cherries, the pits

of avocados building to trees in their pots
on the south-facing shelf over the money drawer.
They are as sunny and safe as Tony is not

when he talks, with the fire of fathers, about
his daughter. This is his only daughter. He pays
her husband good money to mind, it turns out,

one of the several stands that Tony owns.
This one he keeps by himself out of sentiment;
it was the first. A man needs to stand alone.

The son-in-law, seven-time planter of fruit
in the womb of the daughter, rankles in Father's accounts.
But most of the money is not in this kind of an outfit,

Tony confides. There are three convents near here
to which he tenders in quantity and at a reverent profit
the best he can bargain at auction for the good sisters.

For the sisters who raise up the young in the way they should go;
for the sisters who govern the sick and reign over women in
labor;
for the sisters whose business it is to pray for us all below.

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Tony cuts me a grapefruit from Texas. The pink spokes
are outlined in white; there are three white seeds in the heart.
As he talks, I see his nuns, all Ingres' Odalisques,

who, having pledged with Christ, ought now to be faithful
to gristle and narrow beds, recumbent and at ease instead
inside their habits. For them, plums flown from Brazil,

kumquats and currants, loosed from their leaves in the sun,
Bosc pears and Anjous for them, and small tangerines that will
slip from their skins at the nick of a nail of a nun.

I see them dipping red berries in sugar and telling them,
like beads. They are blackbirds in perfect Byzantium
being fed by Nubian eunuchs on their knees. Amid Te Deums

rise visions of guava and pomegranate when Tony calls.
They are blessed with casabas and mangoes and over them all
hangs Tony's lost ear, a relic, blessed on the wall.

The Lonely One

Intact, a little dread joggling my elbows,
I drive down the bareback street, forthright
for miles, past houses that hulk like rows
of gravid women, hands loose in their laps.
No birds now are strapped to the telephone wires.
The traffic blinker's gone blind since midnight,
but yellow light leaks from the firehouse where
my servants hunch over card games or craps,
and white slits spill under the hospital windows,
governed by starch. Crosswise, one cat goes
burning the night with its eyes.
Alone here,
I will people the fallen hours with bakers
up to their wristbones in the yeasty vats,
with cub reporters covering the peacemakers,

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merciful squad cars, sirens on full tone,
a watchman, tipped back in his chair, reading Dickens,
all manner of lovers locked in the sure vault
of each other, mothers with newborns buttoned
at breast.
I will leave no one alone.
But somewhere all night, God help us, Ishmael,
specific cruelty goes cleating down cellar,
tools in its hands, to torture the faithful.

Ballade for the Virgins

Christiansted, St. Croix

Under the mackerel cloud pack where
this vestal in her watered silk
shapes up, a green half mile offshore,
and dusts her décolletage with talc,
a reef of razor coral skulks.
Sea urchins prune and strop their spears,
those spines athwart each crotch and stalk
that warned Columbus once, *beware,*

and brought down squads of buccaneers
who came to bilk, but bogged to hulks
caught in her tricky underwear.
We come here, goggled gentlefolk,
equipped with bubbles, shod with calks
under the lady's silks, to score
her flaxen forest, conch and whelk
that warned Columbus once, *beware,*

and sent him sailing past her snare
in search of gentler bays. We walk
where foolish bandy-fish career
in chambers soft as schoolroom chalk

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and where we step, the reef bleeds milk
and where we breathe, the bubbles veer
off castles antlered broad as elk
that warned Columbus once, *beware.*

Goddess, where gauzy fishes sulk
swilling our exhalèd air,
I swear I hear the same sweet talk
that warned Columbus once, *beware.*

ISABEL CASSERES

She with a Missing Finger

from the Spanish of Gabriela Mistral

Well, my finger got caught in a clam,
And then the clam fell into the sand,
And the sea came up and swallowed the sand,
And a whaler fished it out of the sea,
And the whaler came to Gibraltar;
And now in Gibraltar the fishermen cry,
—"News of the earth brought up from the sea,
News of a little girl's finger:
Let she who is missing it come and see!"

Give me a ship to go and find it,
Give me a captain to steer for me,
Give me the wages for my captain,
Give him the city, to pay for me:
Marseilles is a city of ships and towers,
The finest city that one could see;
But not so fine, with one of its girls
Having a finger lost in the sea,
And the fishermen calling her through the streets,
Waiting for her in Gibraltar. . .

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ANTHONY HECHT

Shades of Keats and Marvell

> "One feels at moments as if one could with a touch convey a vision—that the mystic vision & sexual love use the same means—opposed yet parallel existences."
>
> —*W. B. Yeats, in a letter of May 25, 1926, quoted in Richard Ellmann's* Yeats: The Man and The Mask.

THIS ESSAY PROPOSES to put Marvell's "The Garden" and Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" side by side, and in comparing them to remark some important resemblances that I think have not been noticed before. It seems proper for me to begin by saying that I very greatly admire both of these poems, and I do not think myself in danger of using one of them (or its author, or its period) to humiliate the other. Furthermore, it will be important to me, not only to make clear the correspondences I seem to find, but the differences as well, so that I have every hope of respecting the rich integrity of each poem as a discrete work of art. If I am right in supposing a common theme and design in the poems, and perhaps even (to the degree that these can be articulated) a corresponding set of feelings, then perhaps at the end it would be possible to make some tentative remarks about the shift of sensibility between the two periods involved, and to see this shift as something legible in the poems themselves.

To generalize at first. Each is a private meditation of the poet, alone and in a natural setting; in both cases, as a consequence of an extraordinary and superior passivity, an exquisite secular and sensuous ecstasy is experienced; in both cases this ecstasy seems like the departure of the "soul" from the body, and like an inkling of a blissful death; and in both cases the return to the natural setting, the "real world," at the end of the ecstasy is accompanied by an intimation that perhaps only the ecstasy itself was real, and that while ecstasy had been identified with death at the highest moment of its experience, it might rather be the most intense sense of life, whereas the return to the transitory world might be a return to dying and to death. Both poems depend upon a delib-

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erately ambiguous feeling about death: death is a constituent of the physical world of contingency and flux, and to participate in that world is to be at the mercy of death; but death is also the static and passive state of isolation which is the initial condition for the ecstasy, and which the ecstasy envisions. Both poems, by their secular settings and sensuous detail, and by their peculiar insistence upon the poets' isolation, present us with a sort of *Liebestod,* which is self-induced and autoerotic.

"The Garden" opens on a note of contempt for the vanity of human effort, particularly that effort which the "world" esteems and delights to crown with a symbolic wreath of victory. The most honored worldly pursuits are made to seem no more important than a footrace; at least the athletic and artistic competitions, and even wars, are seen as mere games. And since the crown is spare and symbolic, "some single herb," it cannot afford the ample comfort of cool shade one would want after so much strenuous endeavor. One should not accept the figurative satisfaction for the real thing—at least, so the first stanza suggests. But this is not a cheap and easy cynicism; the joke at the expense of labor is very lightly stated, and if the poet seems to be recommending a kind of sloth, it is sanctified by nature. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin." This is not only a Christian sentiment but a conventional part of the pastoral mode of feeling. Nature is innocent because it is unconscious of its virtue, and its perfect existence is therefore effortless. The sweaty endeavors of men are doubly shameful in being, even at their best, conscious attempts at different sorts of "virtue," and in appropriating the innocence of the garden to symbolize this vanity. The garden stands opposed to the world, not only in the genuine comfort it offers to the overheated, but also because of its association with the Garden of Eden, and of Paradise, and through both of these as well as independently, with death. The association with death I think is clearest at the end, when the sundial is mentioned: by which both bees and men compute their time, as the mortuary tone of sundial inscriptions solicits us to do. In the first stanza, however, the garden is not merely set off against the world, but it has a wreath of victory superior to the world's crowns.

> While all Flow'rs and all Trees do close
> To weave the Garlands of repose.

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I have no doubt that the primary meaning is the obvious one suggested above, but I cannot believe that the idea of a funeral wreath is improper here. When men have run their race they go to their ultimate repose in a sort of garden; and I take this to be merely the first hint of a theme that is insisted upon more strongly later in the poem. It is a part of Marvell's wit to let us discover late in the course of things that the natural world is one vast cemetery. *Et in Arcadia ego,* the mild words of Death, were a familiar enough theme in the pastoral poetry and painting of the Renaissance. And the theme served this particular dramatic purpose: it prevented the image of utopian innocence and bliss, the pure pastoral life, from being too far removed from actual experience.

But the cemetery, which is the proper emblem of repose and solitude, is still a garden, and conveniently maintains its double identification with life and death. Its plants are themselves the innocent emblems of the abstract and Platonic perfections which the ecstasy is moving toward, and while they are part of the perishable, created world, they partake of an ardent and incorporeal greenness, which is irreducible and everlasting. Green is "lovely," being at once amorous and beautiful; more beautiful and amorous than women because it invites us toward a contemplation of its pure and disembodied essence, absolute Beauty and absolute Love, which is to say, Paradise. The slighting remarks about women's beauty are not to be taken, I feel certain, as stern-minded Puritan asceticism, or even as stern-minded Platonism. The human faculties shall receive their peculiar satisfactions, and the body shall not be denied. Love runs its heat, like the athletic competitors, but it is wiser than they in aspiring at last to the garden.

> When we have run our Passions heat,
> Love hither makes his best retreat.

This seems to suggest not only that when we have exhausted our carnal passions we will be fit initiates for a more sublime Love (which, as novices, we must approach in the manner of a religious retreat),[1] but also that the garden provides the ideal garland for the victor in Love's race, as the gods themselves have proven. And not only the gods—the women they chased, as well.

[1] Also: Properly to advance is to go back ("retreat") to the simplicities and elemental truths of nature.

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The *Gods,* that mortal Beauty chase,
Still in a Tree did end their race.
Apollo hunted *Daphne* so,
Only that She might Laurel grow.
And *Pan* did after *Syrinx* speed,
Not as a Nymph, but for a Reed.

On the surface there is the ingenious misreading of the myth to suggest that the gods had metamorphosis in mind as the ultimate aim and ambition of their chase. This has the ironic effect of reversing the whole motive force of the original stories in a sort of comic euphemism, and ascribing to Apollo and Pan a surprising and unlikely chastity. At the same time, it was the women, in the original myths, who elected transformation to escape a fate worse than death. But there are grounds upon which we can accept this as more than a sophisticated joke. Mortal beauty is precisely mortal, and these women have immortalized themselves in myths by becoming sacred emblems of the gods. They are the vivid and present symbols of divine perfection, and are therefore more beautiful than they were as women. So that the conceit of trees being more lovely than women is given its serious ground.

Certainly the gods' pursuit of beauty, and the purifying of that beauty by metamorphosis, leads directly to the altered state of the poet. The fifth, sixth, and seventh stanzas invite the ideal satisfaction of the body, the mind and the soul. The body has its dignified and respectable place in the scale of being, for the body most simply and directly apprehends the garden. The delicious substantiality of the fifth stanza is not entirely innocent of sexual overtones. The poet is certainly completely passive as Nature forces herself upon him in a quite overpowering way. There is a species of physical rape going on here which is acceptable because it is pleasant, and because Nature cannot be gainsaid, and because this delightful passivity is the first state and condition of the ecstasy which is leading the poet to purer and rarer pleasures. And finally because it is innocent: we are in a version of Eden. The body here is accepting the figurative satisfaction for the real, as we were warned not to do at the beginning. But this is as far as the body can go, and the mind, in any case, is not deceived.

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Mean while the Mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness:
The Mind, that Ocean where each kind
Does streight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;
Annihilating all that's made
To a green Thought in a green Shade.

The final couplet of this stanza must always have seemed one of the most striking and puzzling things in the poem, and not least of all because of the odd construction, "annihilating . . . to". If I am right about the poem as a whole, it presents us not merely with a graduated series of raptures, but with graduated states of consciousness, the highest form of which seems almost like unconsciousness, or death. But on the way, several little deaths have been experienced; a process of purification by metamorphosis is going on, and has already been hinted at by the transformations of Daphne and Syrinx. This progress agrees with the language and ritual of the mystery cults, which Plato used to describe the advance toward perfection which the soul must make in its search for knowledge and beauty. The "self" is transformed, and is thereby annihilated. And since perfection can only be glimpsed by the purified spirit, the mind must annihilate all that is worldly in the world, and in itself.

To return to the opening of the stanza. The mind has its pleasures, which the body does not understand. For one thing, it can contemplate itself (lines 3 and 4); and then it can contemplate itself contemplating itself (lines 5 and 6); and why should this process end here? such logic seems to inquire. The mind is the mirrored and microscopic image of the world; it is so even unconsciously; but the "reflective" mind may be aware of itself, and may see itself as a repeated image; in which case it has, in that very act of imagination, created a new reflection or mirrored image of the original. And by this process of infinite refinement and detachment, we arrive at the irreducibles; the world and the mind are still there, "a green thought in a green shade," but it is now a nice question which is which. The green thought may be the idea of the world, all that is left of it, and the green shade the purified condition of the mind. Regarded the other way around,

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the world and the mind are still no more than phantoms of their former "selves." There is something both intoxicating and ghostly about this process, which I believe is very deliberate, and in which both the mind and the world are sublimed away, leaving only their essential greenness.

The body is now in its swoon upon the grass, and the mind has retired beyond itself into greenness, and the great climax of the poem awaits only the satisfaction of the soul, which instantly departs from the body and addresses itself to greenness by gliding into the boughs. This is a momentary death, a preview and promise of what is to come when the soul is "prepared for longer flight." Our feelings here are directed by the delightfulness and cheerfulness of the language, which transfigures this moment of death into life, as Daphne and Syrinx were transfigured. But this has not been a "real" death; it is only a brief state something like death. And the vision of paradise it entertains is only *like* Paradise—as Eden is *like* Heaven but is not the same. It can therefore only be described by analogy: "Such was that happy garden-state. . ." Now certainly analogy, metaphor, symbol and simile are the very stock-in-trade of poetry, and it is hardly surprising to find Marvell using them. But I suspect he is using his analogy here in accordance with the Platonic idea that the soul cannot apprehend perfection directly until it has perfected itself. So that when Glaucon asks, in *The Republic,* what the idea of the good is, Socrates can only tell him that it is *like* sunlight, as opposed to the shadows of the mythical cave. And we may notice that Marvell has not only progressed from the "shade" to the "various light," but that in the course of the poem he has repudiated, by graduated steps, diverse satisfactions that seemed to be real, but were discovered to be mere tokens. This was clear enough in the first stanza, but I think we are meant to feel, at the most intense moment of transport, that the garden itself is the microscopic image of Paradise, to be transcended and repudiated when the soul is actually "prepared for longer flight." In the mean time, in the world of time, it is a splendid metaphor of promise and bliss, stretching between two paradisal states: Eden, which came before, and Heaven, which comes after.

But I anticipate. It is the lightness of tone of the seventh stanza which makes this literal, if momentary, death delightful; and the

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transitional analogy to Eden continues this lightness, with its banter against women; so that only by the shift of tense—"Such *was* that happy garden-state"—do we even suspect that the ecstasy has come to an end, and that we are being gently returned to the worldly garden by way of a digression through Eden. If the joke against Eve is a little more nakedly ruthless than the earlier remarks about women, it perhaps has its biblical justification. But at the same time it reaffirms the notion that ideal Love is not the love of created things, or is so only incidentally. And Eve was not like Daphne and Syrinx in being willing to annihilate herself in the name of a purer and less corporeal love. It has the effect as well of insisting again on solitude as the condition of bliss. (Helpmeets are no help if no help is needed.) And the final couplet of the stanza suggests the distinction between Eden and Heaven. Without Eve, Eden would have been Heaven (i.e., no fall; consequently, no knowledge or need of a more perfect condition) and since there is no marriage or giving in marriage in Heaven, Heaven will be Eden without Eve.

By the return to the poem of the reflective mind in the seventh stanza, we are brought gracefully and easily back to the garden in which we began, and which we now understand as the earliest stage in a series of perfections, passing through Eden to Heaven. But by returning to the world of Time the poet returns to the world of death, where his only reasonable ambition, as opposed to the vain ambitions of worldly men, is to look forward to death by computing his time. He is in an ideal situation to do this: the formal garden is a cosmos in little, worked out in carefully designed flowerbeds. The "milder sun" may itself be composed of flowers at the center of the circle of the zodiac, or it might be the actual sun, whose heat so much troubled the world of competitors and lovers, beginning now to decline from the intensity which it offered at the beginning of the poem, and from which the poet had withdrawn into the shade. In either case, the sun and the zodiac are both images of Time, and man's life, though longer than a bee's from one point of view, is really not longer in the light of eternity. Death is here, even in Arcadia; or as this poet would have it, especially in Arcadia. Yet the hours spent here must be sweet and wholesome, for these flowerbeds are an antici-

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pation of Heaven, both in ultimate expectation and in present symbol.

I do not for a moment suppose that this brief commentary has exhausted the poem. I have intended only to outline what I take to be its main design and theme, and I hope later to be able to correct a little bit the haste and crudeness of this account.

If one agrees that the design of Keats's "Nightingale" Ode is like the design of Marvell's "Garden," one might object at least that Keats's gestures, in comparison, seem somewhat exaggerated. But it is hard to say just what "exaggerated" means here. You cannot be hyperbolic about the extremities of existence, and there is nothing in Keats as extravagant as Marvell's cramming of two paradises into one. If Marvell seems to proceed by paradox and oxymoron, this is also truer of Keats's poem than a casual reading might suppose. The first six lines of the Ode suggest that the extreme of happiness is just like the extreme of despair, and, by implication, to feel either one is to feel its opposite. I think it is right to notice something surprising in the way this paradox about feeling is stated, for it obliges us to reverse our own feelings in mid-career from the direction they seemed to be taking in the opening lines. And we are being directed to more than a contrast or coincidence of happiness and despair: life and death, mortality and immortality, consciousness and unconsciousness, become the ambiguous ground of the poem, and work toward a momentary reconciliation. Moreover, in the first two lines we have the oxymoron: "a drowsy numbness pains/My sense. . ." If hemlock is a painless, anaesthetizing poison, it is still painful to know that you are dying; so that the states of unconsciousness and consciousness are simultaneously brought into play, and the body is divided from the imagination. The third and fourth lines insist upon this even more emphatically. An absolute division occurs at the crisis of the poem. But I had better return to the beginning.

> In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his

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> hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of the nightingale. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his *Ode to a Nightingale.*

This famous and impressive anecdote of Charles Brown's is delightful, and I think there is no reason to suppose it is not true. To be sure, the poem itself has a nocturnal setting, or at least it is night by the time we reach the fourth stanza. But I see no reason to doubt the powers of Keats's imagination enough to deny that he could have written the poem in the morning. And yet, without wishing to make too much of this, I think it interesting to notice that the poem was written in spring, and that the flowers mentioned in the fifth stanza are all spring flowers. The point here would be that both the bird and the flowers are anticipating summer, in the sense of looking forward to it as the season of richness and fulfillment, just as the poet (i.e., the speaker of the poem) looks forward to a consummation. The bird sings of summer, and the coming muskrose will be the haunt of summer flies, and the richness of death is as yet, at the beginning of the poem, only a token and a promise. The sense of emergence I mean to suggest here is insisted upon more strongly in the second stanza, where the wine that was "cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth," comes out of darkness and burial richly transfigured into life, "Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!" The paradox that wine that has been cooled should taste of "the warm South," and that the brilliance and substantiality of its evocations should make the poet "fade away into the forest dim," is more, I think, than a mere confusion of the senses, though undoubtedly this is part of Keats's method. The stanza presents us with a sort of resurrection, full of immediate joy and happy augury. But at the same time "fade" is both death and an escape from death, and we are bound to have mixed feelings about it.

I must interrupt myself at this point to acknowledge that I have perhaps taxed the word "paradox" a bit too heavily, and to assure the reader that I am not offering a doctrinal reading of this poem according to the strictures of Mr. Cleanth Brooks. In any case, his sense of the poem, as it appears in *Understanding Poetry,* is different enough from mine. Properly speaking, "paradox" is a term

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of logic applied to propositions; and I have used it rather freely to apply to feelings. And yet, while it is clear that we would be rash in attempting to construct a square of logical oppositions for the feelings, we are used to finding them in dramatic conflict, both in life and in art, and often enough within the individual soul. Not infrequently they propose themselves in terms of polarities, making complex and "diametrically" opposed claims upon us. There is a very beautiful and explicit description of this "paradox of feeling" in the Christmas Sermon of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral.* The Archbishop explains to his congregation that in celebrating Mass on Christmas Day, "we celebrate at once the Birth of Our Lord and his Passion and Death upon the Cross. Beloved," he continues, "as the World sees, this is to behave in a very strange fashion. For who in the World will both mourn and rejoice at once and for the same reason? For either joy will be overborne by mourning, or mourning will be cast out by joy; so it is only in these our Christian mysteries that we can rejoice and mourn at once and for the same reason."[2] It has seemed very likely to me, moreover, that something of this "paradox of feeling" lies behind the puzzle of Aristotelian Katharsis. If "pity" is that feeling of generous sympathy which at the same time allows us to remember ourselves as members of the audience and therefore exempt from the hero's catastrophe; and if "terror" is that feeling of utter hypothetical identification with the hero, putting us in his shoes upon the stage, we are caught in an impossible dilemma. We can't be on stage and in the audience at the same time, nor at once both subject to terrible calamity and exempt from it. These feelings cast each other out, giving place, as in the religious mysteries, to a new feeling which has about it the mystery of a paradox resolved. The Tragic feeling is precisely this: both joyous and sad. We do not weep at a tragedy for it presents us with a spectacle of human nobility that is exalting and a cause for joy. But the price that must be paid to instruct us in how deep and powerful are the resources of the human spirit is terrible, inscrutable and universal.

To get back to Keats. It is the third stanza of the poem that has

[2] ". . . between logical contradiction (or seeming contradiction) and certain forms of religious feeling there is a close relation, of which the historic manifestations have never been sufficiently studied." (A. O. Lovejoy, "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall.")

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given even the most partial critics a moment of embarrassment. Here is the rather severe judgment of Allen Tate. "Looked at from any point of view, this stanza is bad. . . . It gives us a 'picture' of common reality, in which the life of man is all mutability and frustration. But here if anywhere in the poem the necessity to dramatize time, or the pressure of actuality, is paramount. *Keats had no language of his own for this realm of experience.* That is the capital point." Mr. Tate goes on to equate the evasiveness he finds here with Keats's general reluctance to offer any clear, dramatic delineation of sexual love. But he relates it even more intimately to his conviction that Keats is a pictorial poet, a poet of space, "whose problem was to find a way of conveying what happens in time; for it is time in which dramatic conflict takes place. . . . 'The form of thought in Keats,' says Mr. Kenneth Burke, 'is mystical, in terms of an eternal present'—and, I should add, in terms of the arrested actions of painting."

It is hard to know how to defend Keats against such charges as these. The stanza in question is not one of the high points of the poem, but I cannot bring myself to believe that it is quite the blemish it has been made out to be. It seems to me that Mr. Tate is begging the question when he speaks of *"this realm of experience"* for which Keats had no language of his own. No doubt Mr. Tate would answer, "Come, come, let's not quibble about anything so elementary. Any sensible man knows what kind of reality Keats is evading or unable to render here." My answer would be that it is not my quibble, but Keats's. If we once accept the conviction that "reality is an activity of the most august imagination," that the world operates upon the imagination and the imagination, in turn, upon the world in a lively process that is nowhere discontinuous, then it is impossible to appeal to a certain level of reality as being the premise and center of every imaginative act. And this seems to me one of the important points of not only this, but of many of Keats's poems. On the other hand, it is perfectly clear that Keats had some doubts upon this point himself, which account for the touching and very successful end of the poem; and I don't want to sound as if I must eat my cake and have it too. It does seem to me important to rescue the stanza from a sense that it is no more than an adolescent peevishness at the tribulations of life and its insubstantial joys. If it is true that the stanza

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offers a very simplistic notion of Time as the Author of Ruin, it is also true that the rest of the poem, both what went before and what comes after, is concerned to confute this, and to give to time a more complex and subtle status of reality. To the degree that the poem is an anticipation of bliss, time is an instrument of its consummation.

I suspect that what Mr. Tate is really boggling at here is what he calls, in another essay, "romantic irony." The poet defies the natural world to break him if it can; and of course it can, and it does. I am sure there is something of this in the third stanza; Keats is telling us about all the obstacles he is going to have to overcome, and they are all familiar and insuperable. But his desire to overcome them is at least as serious as the Platonist's, and if they appear as stylized, transparent allegorical figures (fading Youth and Beauty and Love) I should think it might well signify that he has already made some progress toward his goal. And reasonably enough. He feels doped and drunk and poisoned. Certainly the world of simple time must be beginning to dissolve into phantoms, just as the wine has proposed its phantoms in the sense that the wine "tastes" of dance and sunburnt mirth. Moreover, it seems clear that a contrast of phantoms is intended: the first, "unreal" on its primary level, are the images conjured up to the senses by drink, and not even real drink, just imaginary drink, but the images have a substantival life and solidity to the sense; the other phantom is "real" on its primary level (time *will* destroy youth and beauty) but the images it conjures up are pale, unrealized and ghostly. The first is real to the imagination: wine, and its burden of song and dance. The second is real to the intellect: the *fact* of mortality and failing powers. The effect is therefore more firmly to divide the mind from the imagination.

There is one more point I should like to make; it is rather slight, but worth making. Keats's stanzas here seem like large blocks of poetry with a lot crammed into them, and there is no doubt an inclination to read them all at the same stately pace. But I should like to suggest that the syntax, beginning with the last line of the second stanza and ending with the first line of the fourth, makes of most of the third stanza a sort of large parenthetical aside. It is the word, "away," that ties the parts together, and after wishing that he might fade far away, he says (omitting

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the parenthesis) "Away! Away! for I will fly with thee. . . ." The syntactical logic of the poem moves directly from the second stanza to the fourth; though this doesn't mean that the third is unnecessary, any more than an aside is unnecessary.

The transformations that are going on (pain into pleasure, consciousness into unconsciousness, life into death and death into life) bring us, in the fourth and fifth stanzas, to the height of the ecstasy with a division of the faculties so severely insisted on as to amount almost to bilocation. What has gone before (not least of all the third, or disreputable, stanza) provides us with an explanation and excuse for the slightly contemptuous anti-intellectualism of the line about the "dull brain" that "perplexes and retards." The nightingale has gradually been transformed by this time, not so much by references to itself as by the other actions of the poem. At the beginning it was merely a bird whose lovely song provoked pain that was like joy, or joy that was like pain. The imaginary vintage its song inspires presents us with an image of the richness of life emerging from death, and I should think that a myth is being most gently hinted at. Moreover, if the imagination can get itself looped on imaginary wine, it can do better than that: it can ascend on the viewless wings of Poesy. And the ascension is a kind of death, leaving the body, though fully sentient, in "embalmèd darkness," like the buried wine. And by this series of delicate equations, the bird and its song have come to correspond to the poet and this poem he is writing, by virtue of their common ability to make pain into joy and transform death into life. Philomela is never mentioned, but is as present as Bacchus and Pegasus. We have been admirably prepared for that stunning line, "Now more than ever it seems rich to die." Imagination is content to let the wings be "viewless" and to leave it a matter of speculation as to whether indeed the "Queen-Moon is on her throne,/Clustered around by all her starry Fays." It is enough to be there, beyond the reach of earth-bound senses, in the nightingale's company. The senses are down below (as they were with Marvell) and even they must speculate, by transforming, in their own imaginative method, smell into sight. The body, buried in its embalmèd darkness, looks to its resurrection, not only by this simple but mysterious transformation of senses, but by its imaginative anticipation, in mid-May, of the richness of summer, the *coming* musk-rose,

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full of dewy wine; not there yet, but as real and present as the draught of vintage; so that the body sings "of summer" even as the bird, and even while separated from the lofty and transcendent imagination.

It seems appropriate to point out—though not to worry—a certain morbid sexuality here. The body's hankering after fulfillment, no less than the imagination's, has been invested with strong feelings, and the preparations for this consummation are like the preparations for death. It seems as if, with Keats, the embassies of love can only be admitted when the faculties are helplessly divided, as in the moments before death, and I think it is not at all unlikely to see here a prefiguring of Rimbaud's "deliberate derangement of the senses." In any case, we have on Keats's part a fascination with sex combined with a curiously spinisterish horror of it—and in this poem its presence may have been nearly unconscious to the poet. But it was a deep part of his ritual sense of love that it be inaugurated by a foretaste of sensual pleasure through the heaping up and accumulation of delicious sensory experience in almost a covetous, and at the same time, puritanical way. Such is the case in the "Eve of St. Agnes" and in "Endymion." And in all these cases, the most convincing part of the sexual feeling is in fact conveyed by the relish for tastes and smells—and not of human beings, but of innocent and symbolic substitutes in the form of fruits and sweetmeats. And the reason for this, here as elsewhere, is that description beyond a certain point is impossible precisely because the sexual experience is a trance like death, passive, unconscious. And in the poem, it should be remembered, the poet is approaching this condition in solitary self-absorption. The psychologists have some rather nasty terms to apply to appetites such as this, but they are only slightly more insulting (by virtue of their slightly greater authority) than the original views of Keats's poems by many of his contemporaries. Indeed, the attitude of objective, superior contempt, and the grounds for this attitude, would be the same in both cases; the grounds being, most temperately, a certain unmanly passivity and emotional waywardness unattractive even in a very young man.

And here in the poem we are in the midst of a superb but figurative death which (buttressed by the promise of resurrection) the poet now desires and imagines to be made real. And it is here that

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Keats lays the trap for himself in which he is caught in the last stanza, and in which he is obliged to confess that the correspondence he had all along implied between the bird's song and his own song, and between the "Immortal Bird" and himself was a rhetorical device that must at last be abandoned. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Death, the absolute division of the faculties, that utter passivity which is a process of fading away into a simultaneous consciousness and unconsciousness, has been made inviting and delicious; it is solicited and firmly imagined in the next stanza, in which an even more violent division is made than heretofore: ecstasy and consciousness are identified with the bird, numbness and unconsciousness with the poet. He has become the bird's audience, and therefore, in a sense, his own. And yet we cannot quite credit this, for he is still in the very process of writing a poem, and he is no longer depending upon the bird for support, but on the viewless wings of Poesy. Still, he is only imagining what it would be like to die under these pleasant circumstances, "To cease upon the midnight with no pain." The bird's song is and has always been a requiem; the poet's imagined death does not make it so; it simply makes his passivity and unconsciousness absolute and complete. The immortality of art abides the human death. And does it honor by commemoration. That is to say, all songs are requiems, all poems elegies, making something sweet out of life in the very teeth of death. And so the bird is duly acknowledged as immortal, and even from the earliest times there was always some one who had gone before, and whom the nightingale could appropriately mourn. The song is always the same, indirectly suggesting that the bird is always the same, i.e., literally immortal. And yet the bird is certainly immortal by virtue of the immortality of its song. The difference is important; Keats might hope for one kind of immortality, not the other.

The nightingale was heard long ago by all sorts and conditions of people, reminding them of the generations past, and what could have been more apt than the sound of that song to Ruth, who seems even more remote to us (because of the quasi-real context of the Bible) than the ancient days of emperor and clown. And more remote yet, due to a general dubiety about their reality-status, are those "magic casements, opening on the foam/Of peril-

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ous seas, in faery lands forlorn." Indeed, "forlorn" is the key word here, not only because it recalls the poet to his isolated self, but because it has to do with the central problem of the whole poem: a reliance upon and confidence in the powers of the imagination. The faery lands are forlorn precisely because nobody any longer believes in them. And on what grounds are we to claim that Ruth, or the emperor and clown are more real and worthy of belief, since it is only by an act of the imagination that we can apprehend them? And most important of all, if the faery lands were "merely" the perishable creations of imagination, now abandoned for want of belief in them, what confidence, if any, may we have in the reality of the imagination, including the experience the poet has just gone through? The degree of self-consciousness invoked by that one word, "forlorn," which tolls the poet back to his "sole-self" is staggering as well as sudden. And this is by no means the only poem of Keats's in which this problem is made central and dramatic; in fact, it is one of his major themes. In the "Ode to Psyche" he laments that the goddess has "No shrine, no grove, no heat/Of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming," and goes on to say, "O brightest! though too late for antique vows,/Too, too late for the fond believing lyre. . . ." Nevertheless, he volunteers to be her priest, "and build a fane/In some untrodden region of my mind,/ Where branchèd thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,/Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind: . . ." It should be noticed, however, that in the Psyche Ode the problem is not fully faced because the continuity between the exterior and interior world is made so fragile and tenuous as not really to present a problem at all. It is, in its own mode, thoroughly successful, and has what may be the most breathlessly passionate ending of any poem in English. The Nightingale Ode, on the other hand, is busy making metaphysical inquiries about itself such as the Psyche Ode does not contemplate; and in my opinion this gives it a density and complexity which I must deny the other in spite of its indubitable beauty. The difference between the odes is precisely the difference between Psyche (goddess & mind) and a nightingale (symbol of art through suffering & a bird); in one case there is no need for the *facts* of the outside world to be acknowledged; but the bird starts off as a bird and must remain one, no matter how much mythical weight it is made to bear. Moreover, the fact that the Nightingale

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Ode ends irresolutely seems to me both dramatic and honest, and in no way to diminish its force and point. For the fact is that we are entitled to an unresolved doubt at the end. It is true, the claims that were made upon the "fancy" were extravagant; but the experience of the poet, up to a certain point, has undoubtedly been real enough, and it was almost entirely predicated on that "deceiving elf," the fancy. Almost, except for the bird-song. And that song, like this poem, is both "an ecstasy" and a "requiem." If the bird-song "fades" as the imagination fails, and if the poet is left in doubt about the reality of his present lonely circumstances as well as the reality of the ecstasy (which was a kind of token death), we are left with the paradox that the numbness, bewilderment and confusion which he so much desired at the beginning of the poem he now has in plenty, but finds it only distressing. And yet the paradox is not real, for like Marvell, he did not quite die, but was left only with the symptoms of death. And his despair, if that's what it is, arises from being "tolled back" as by a death-knell from the sovereign heights above the perilous seas. It is death to faery land, and a sudden vacant, non-ecstatic death to him. But it is death to the imagination only if the whole poem is called into question. There is no doubt that Keats does so call it, but I should think that he hoped it would offer its own uncompromising answer.

And how shall we describe, in general terms, the differences between these poems? In these two ways, I think. First, the Marvell is a gradual ascent to the emotional summit, with an equally gradual and graceful descent; whereas the Keats is a sudden rising, an attempt to sustain flight, and an equally sudden, unexpected deflation. And this can be attributed to the second difference, which lies in the fact that Marvell's poem is debonaire and witty, while Keats's is grand and self-conscious. Let me put it in more particular terms. Marvell is speaking in the language of Platonism cum pastoralism cum feelings and is using, most loosely, the old allegorical mode of speech. No reader is supposed to believe that the poet is a rank Platonist and pagan; it is set down by the poet beforehand as a compliment to the reader's own civility and sophistication that he should know better. "This is a mode, reputable in its own time, of describing my feelings," Marvell seems to say.

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The subject of Keats's poem is also the feelings, but for better or worse, he lacks the allegorical mode—by which I mean a steady set of correspondences which work in a one-for-one relationship throughout. For Marvell this means a relationship of the garden to Eden and Eden to Heaven, which corresponds "loosely" to Plato's Divided Line, which corresponds in turn to a right apprehension, through feelings of transport, of the perfection of love and knowledge. Lacking such parallel reenforcements, Keats is obliged to question his premises, as the man who says, "this is merely a mode of speech," is not. Everything at any point of Keats's discourse might be attacked for its literal relevance, and he is supremely aware of this, as the end of the poem so poignantly shows. Indeed, what he has done is to cast a spell and then anticipate the reader by puncturing it before the reader has a chance—or even an inclination—to do so himself. And this, I think, explains the suddenness of the descent. The Keats poem hangs on a question of *belief*—first and foremost the poet's own belief—in the literal truth of what is being said. The question never comes up for Marvell, who instead describes his feelings by parallel modes of thought. And these he does not ask you to believe in: they are like heresies, false in themselves, but parallel to the truth.

Furthermore, while in both poems the human faculties, though differently delimited and designated, separate from one another in what seems a death-like process of disintegration, there is a striking difference between them to be seen in the process. In Marvell's case, he may have the best of both worlds, since the disintegration is death, but at the same time a progress paralleling the mystical progress of love from body to mind to soul, it being properly entertained by each. The faculties may be discrete and discontinuous, but the "progress" is a continuous one by virtue of an accepted hierarchy among these faculties. Also for Marvell there is emphatically no division between the rational intellect (which apprehends the facts of the world) and the imagination: this is stated quite explicitly in stanza six. But it is a central point for Keats so to divide them; and I should think this is exactly what he was arguing for, and declaring to be so conspicuously absent in Coleridge's temperament (that inveterate bloodhound and archivist of his own thoughts) in the famous passage, from the letter to his brothers, about Negative Capability.

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> . . . and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability,* that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of being content with half-knowledge.

Moreover, Keats accepts no absolute hierarchy among the faculties, and for all his homage, here as elsewhere, to the imagination, he acknowledges that it cannot stand alone and unsupported. Yet this acknowledgment, combined with his suspicion and condemnation of a lusting after fact and reason, leaves him at times very restless and insecure. There are many passages in the letters (most notably the declaration that the Poet has no Identity, and therefore may, and perhaps must, take on the identity of other creatures—real or mythical or imaginary—and of other things; as well as another passage in a letter to Woodhouse, in which, after being in the company of Achilles in the Trenches, and Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily, he "becomes" Troilus, and in the next moment, "I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate that I am content to be alone") testifying to the imagination's *seeming* supremacy, independence, and contempt for fact and reason. But Keats was not absolutely "content to be alone," or to depend unconditionally on such visionary transports; and there is another letter which must be brought into evidence here.

> I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think Poetry itself a mere Jack a lantern to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance. As Tradesmen say everything is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and its worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself nothing—Ethereal things may at least be thus real, divided under three heads—Things real—things semireal—and no things. Things real—such as existences of Sun Moon & Stars and passages of Shakespeare. Things semireal such as Love, the Clouds &c which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist—and Nothings which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit—which by the by stamps the burgundy mark on the bottles of our Minds, insomuch as they are able to 'consecrate whate'er they look upon.'
>
> —To Benj. Bailey, 13 March 1818

Without any condescension to Keats whatever (for he seems to

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suspect as much) it may be said that both as epistemology and metaphysics this passage leaves much to be desired. The three categories of Ethereal things are scarcely very distinct, and the examples he uses reflect Keats's personal tastes and emotional character far more than they do anything else. More troubling still is the problem that if all Ethereal things are made real only by the ardour of the pursuer, it will be impossible to a sufficiently vigorous mind and enterprising spirit to distinguish between Real things and Nothings. But most important of all, the very reality of the existence of all these things (including the Sun and Moon) are called into question; and the mode by which we might apprehend them (which I take to be the imagination) involves us in the frailest and most inconclusive sort of solipsism. We are at liberty, by these terms, to make anything we desire real by the ardour of our pursuit. Yet the very language he uses—"Things real—things semireal—and no things"—suggests that Keats does not altogether believe what he is saying. His tone *is* sceptical and worldly, though perhaps not quite sceptical enough to please us. And indeed almost exactly a year later he returned to the problem more passionately and more thoughtfully in the "Ode to a Nightingale."

Let me go back again to Keats's statement about Negative Capability. As I understand this passage, it speaks in behalf of an unquestioning acceptance of an intuition or aperçu, characterized by the ease, the grace, the gift of its arrival. I take the word "verisimilitude" to mean "metaphor" at the very least, but to carry with it the weight and authority of a Truth. Keats's belief in the effortlessness of getting at this metaphoric Truth (for which means we might supply the name of inspiration or imagination) is touched upon in his famous statement to the effect that "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all." In Lionel Trilling's distinguished introduction to his selection of Keats's letters, he reflects upon the occasion ("not a dispute but a disquisition" addressed to Dilke as Keats walked home with him and with Charles Brown after a Christmas pantomime) which led to this formulation about Negative Capability. "The disquisition touched on 'various subjects' which are not specified," Mr. Trilling reminds us, "and Keats says that as it proceeded 'several things dove-tailed in my

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mind and at once it struck me. . . .' " In undertaking to explain the meaning of what follows, Mr. Trilling seems confident that Keats had in mind at the time a lively sense of his own estimate of the character of Dilke. "It is essential to an understanding of what Keats meant that we have in mind the kind of person who was Keats's interlocutor in the 'disquisition' during which the idea came to him. . . ." says Mr. Trilling, and he proceeds to cite several instances, from later letters, of Keats's repudiation of the "doctrinaire" and "over-systematic process of thought" which he felt would prevent Dilke from ever coming "to a truth so long as he lives; because he is always trying at it." (Not only is rigor objected to, but effort as well). It is precarious, of course, to speculate beyond what the letter tells us on just what Keats did have in mind at the time; what the "various subjects" were, and what were the "several things" that "dove-tailed." Mr. Trilling's suggestion that Dilke's character was itself at that moment a part of the thought seems to me unlikely; or at least I should think it might have inhibited the disquisition of so kindly a person as Keats. It seems more likely to me that the observations on Dilke, while thoroughly fitting, may have come after the fact. But I take courage from Mr. Trilling's willingness to conjecture, and propose another suggestion, though of course it has no better claim to the truth of this matter than his own. Let me present it by way of quotation.

> "What then," I objected, "O Diotima, is Love ugly and evil?"—"Good words, I entreat you," said Diotima; "do you think that every thing which is not beautiful, must of necessity be ugly?"—"Certainly."—"And everything that is not wise, ignorant? Do you not perceive that there is something between ignorance and wisdom?"—"What is that?"—"To have a right opinion or conjecture. Observe, that this kind of opinion, for which no reason can be rendered, cannot be called knowledge; for how can that be called knowledge, which is without evidence or reason? Nor ignorance, on the other hand; for how can that be called ignorance which arrives at the persuasion of that which it really is? A right opinion is something between understanding and ignorance." . . . "Observe, then, that you do not consider Love to be a God."—"What then," I said, "is Love a mortal?"—"By no means."—"But what, then?"—"Like those things which I have instanced, he is neither mortal nor immortal, but something intermediate."—"What is that, O Diotima?"—"A great Daemon, Socrates; and everything daemoniacal holds an intermediate place between what is divine and what is mortal."

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These celebrated passages from Plato's "Symposium" may perhaps be nothing more than fortuitously close to the subject at hand; and I have no care to claim more for them. But they may be seen as bearing handsomely upon the problem of Negative Capability as well as upon the Nightingale Ode. They present us first of all with a mode of apprehension which arrives at the truth without resort to fact or reason (and by a sophistical use of reason in a passage I have omitted, reason is shown to be inadequate in arriving at the truth). Secondly they make a correspondence, by analogy, between this kind of apprehension (inspiration, imagination) and Love; a correspondence which becomes more than analogy later in Diotima's discourse; a correspondence to be found in other parts of Keats's letters (particularly the one to Bailey, dated 13 March, 1818) as well as in the Nightingale Ode. Third, and most important of all to the Ode, that "daemon" is held to be an "intermediate" between "what is divine and what is mortal," as inspiration or right opinion is an intermediate between ignorance and knowledge.[3] And the famous passage that follows, about Love's parentage, and about the qualities and character that are his by inheritance, is a quite thorough-going analogy for the perilous efforts of Keats's imagination to negotiate between the upper and lower regions. It offers some marked parallels to the formulas for desolation in the third stanza; and prefigures, as do Diotima's later remarks about the loneliness and isolation of all mortals, the pitiful and affecting uncertainty of the poem's end.

If the foregoing can tentatively be accepted as a fair description of the case, two possible conclusions may be drawn. One is that Marvell had more confidence in the authenticity and generality of his feelings than Keats, so that they could support his analogies when the analogies could not support them. And I think perhaps this is partly true, but it is only a small part of the truth. On the other hand, the alternative (which concerns the whole question of "belief"—the poet's and the reader's) requires an investigation into the very nature of poetry itself, vastly beyond my present scope and powers.

[3] I.e., half-knowledge, with which Coleridge could never be content.

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HAROLD WITT

Rushmore and Eastward

Rushmore

Rushing to Rushmore, speeding as we read
sphinx comparisons (in the free brochure)
to monumental features of the dead,
we doubted art in such a spacious sculpture

especially done by dynamite and drill,
smirked that workmen with electric hammers
had hacked a factual grandeur from that hill.
We sneered like critics. What did those amateurs,

exploding crude colossi out of stone,
know of Cellini and his detailed golds,
David expressive to the very tendon
or marble Grecians rippling in their robes?

And we were anxious on a trip to elsewhere,
winding narrowness, just to glimpse and go.
Then through a tunnel we saw history centered,
staring four faced, bluish in the glow.

Dazzled travelers, skeptic to the end,
we drove up closer, looked in Lincoln's eye
in which a six foot man could easily stand
and, vita brevis, made a longer stay.

We gazed along the precipice of faces,
silenced by a pyramidal shock—
temples, obelisks, the statued ages
were equaled in that democratic rock.

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Eastward

Eastward, the country flattened into fields,
mesa and canyon in gradual decline
past castled Badlands carved no further light.
These were the acres of necessity—
boredom's landscape stretched, as plain as bread,
to slow horizons, straight on every side;
we heard the tardy bong of each small town
like hours of a clock that's running down.

The shortest distance hummed a strip of dread
until the west diminished in the mind—
did geysers rise, had abstract lava spread
rose lace lavishments bright lands behind?
Attendants drawled us deeper into loss
and wiped the bloody butterflies from view—
we had only imagined glaciers, mountains,
jeweled caves of dreams, improbable as youth.

Dubuque

When I went through Dubuque only in August
nothing of summer thinned the solid town;
hips of housewives before their ugly houses
stuck in the frozen heat, belly and frown

bulged, gouged; I thought of Sinclair Lewis
protesting middlewestness: there it was—
brick-bleak and blank, the fragile druggist
preserved an ancient ennui under glass.

Nothing of leaves or lightness, though there were leaves,
saved from dull geometries of gloom
bare flat houses on their squares like lives
identically windowed, and little light let in.

There were no flowers flaring for that funeral;
the grievers in a loss of afternoon
hardly knew they mourned; the good, the beautiful
rotted, in strict extinction, underground.

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Inside Iowa

Thundering Iowa hissed a hostile rain
as if at us, the dark dragon of weather
forking tongues of lightning over corn,
and we slowed down, sliding through the splatter,

feeling our wheels go slick as rolling pigs.
We blinked for signs of coffee, lit cafes
to warm us from a leaking harm like dikes
but towns and farms slipped deeper in that haze.

The cornbins glistened and the silos flashed
pictures in a tungsten suddenness;
the tails of the stormy monster lashed
flickering scales across the muddiness.

Then at a deluged corner, warehouse-square,
a coalsmoke restaurant, brick and hardly lettered,
next to a factory for fertilizer
spelled oasis, stark, old, dark and battered.

We ran around the building in the rain
like figures in a nightmare, trying doors,
and all were locked except the magic one
that opened on a sesame of mirrors,

pink lights, rich carpets, politesse,
a maître d'hôtel bowing from the gilt—
laconic Iowa or ironic Paris?
We rested among graciousness, and felt

a friendliness replenishing our cups,
the difference of interiors, a dream
of shelter from the mire of the maps
that only showed us where we hadn't been.

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The Dragon

varies; whatever shape it takes—[1]
monster of jealousy, conjecture's dinosaur,
or twined in leafy knowledge whispering *Eve,*
sometimes a skin winged insect, sometimes a flower,
remains essentially a snake, experts agree.

Consider Chimaera and the Oedipal Sphinx,
both mostly serpents, partly lions,
one with a lion's face, the other a woman's,
flaming bodies tapering to tails
that coil and slink and wink with inky scales.

Properly handled, though they hang like cobras
their fierce-fanged aspects in the burning air,
harmless as garters or snakes preferring gophers
they either wither, sizzle, or aren't there—
weapons and wit put out their direst fires.

Beowulf bagged the winged, gold-guarding worm,
St. George gored the horrible tyrannosaur,
less hissing lizard than a sense of sin—
the sensual dragon had been christianized
but hadn't changed its snake-essential form.

Chinese chiselers chipped a charming shape
and made the dragon visible in jade;
often along the headdress of a bride,
sliding through lilies, silver dragons played.
In one Sung painting, amphibious among rocks,

beneath a waterfall, a dragon family romps.
Sinister saurians reported seen at sea
probably aren't actual, though there is a dragon
called the Komodo, which, except for fiery breath,
slithering reptilian, looks mythical enough.

1 ". . . the dragon of mythology, whatever shape it may have assumed, remains essentially a snake."—*Encyclopaedia Britannica*

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ROBERT BLY

Summer in Minnesota

1

After a drifting day, visiting the bridge near Louisberg,
With the hot muddy river flowing
Under the excited swallows,
Now in the hot noon
We plunge through the hot beanfields,
And the sturdy alfalfa fields, the farm groves
Like heavy green smoke close to the ground.

2

Inside me there is a confusion of swallows,
Birds flying through the smoke,
And horses galloping excitedly on fields of short grass.

3

Still, we are falling,
Falling into the open mouths of darkness,
Into the Congo as if into a river,
Or as wheat into open mills.

September

1

The trees are turning color by the sloughs;
Tractors appear pulling loads of yellow corn;
The sweetclover seems delicate and sweet
In the wide ditches along the highway;
The cold air fills the lungs.

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2

The man worn out after a life of work
Lies down in the rich cold grass in the ditch matted
and heavy.
The day saddens at evening.
Now farmers plow a few feet of earth around cornfields;
The sun reminds us of vast western plains;
The blackbird joyfully leaves his nest.

Three Kinds of Pleasure

1

Sometimes, riding in a car, in Wisconsin
Or Illinois, you notice those dark telephone poles
One by one lift themselves out of the fence line
And slowly leap on the gray sky—
And past them, the snowy fields.

2

The darkness drifts down like snow on the picked
cornfields
In Wisconsin: and on these black trees
Scattered, one by one,
Through the winter fields—
We see stiff weeds and brownish stubble,
And white snow left now only in the wheeltracks of
the combine.

3

It is a pleasure, also, to be driving
Toward Chicago, near dark,
And see the lights in the barns.
The bare trees more dignified than ever,
Like a fierce man on his deathbed,
And the ditches along the road half full of a private
snow.

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Late At Night After An Early November Snow

1

Clouds are passing before the moon,
And from a neighboring farm
The dark sound of a cow comes.

2

Something draws me out to study the ground.
Stiff grass still shows among the snow.
The cold snow crunches beneath the feet.

3

All day I have felt that the earth is sinking,
Quietly away from the oatfields of summer,
Like someone falling deeper in sleep or water.
It sinks like an old man settling into his blood.
Snow is a way of saying Goodbye.
Looking at the plowed field in the south, I see
Dark clumps of earth here and there.

After Drinking All Night With A Friend, We Go Out In A Boat At Dawn To See Who Can Write The Best Poem

These pines, these fall oaks, these rocks,
This water dark and touched by wind—
I am like you, you dark boat
Drifting over water fed by cool springs.

Beneath the waters, since I was a boy,
I have dreamt of strange and dark treasures,
Not of gold, or strange stones, but the true
Gift, beneath the pale lakes of Minnesota.

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This morning also, drifting in the dawn wind,
I sense my hands, and my shoes, and this ink—
Drifting, as all of this body drifts,
Above the clouds of the flesh and the stone.

A few friendships, a few dawns, a few glimpses
of grass,
A few oars weathered by the snow and the heat,
So we drift toward shore, over cold waters,
No longer caring if we drift or go straight.

WILLIAM MEREDITH

Fables about Error

i: *A Ritual Mouse*

The mouse in the cupboard repeats himself.
Every morning he lies upside down
Astonished at the violence of the spring
That has tumbled him and the flimsy trap again.
His beady expressionless eyes do not speak
Of the terrible moment we sleep through.
Sometimes a little blood runs from his mouth,
Small and dry like his person.
I throw him into the laurel bush, as being too small
To give the offenses that occasion burial.

It begins to be winter; he is a fieldmouse
And comes in, but how unwisely, from the cold.
Elsewhere now, and from their own points of view,
Cats and poisoners are making the same criticism:
He seems no wiser for having been taken
A dozen nights running. He looks weak;

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Given a subtler trap, he might have informed
Or tried to bargain with whatever it is mice have.

Surely there is always that in experience
Which could warn us; and the worst
That can be said of any of us is:
He did not pay attention.

ii: *A Fable of Grackles*

Like a rift of acrid smoke
A flock of grackles fling in from the river
And fight for the winter sun
Or for seed, is it, in the flailed grass.
Their speech is a mean and endless quarrel
And even in their rising
They keep a sense of strife, flat across the orchard;
Viciousness and greed
Sharpen the spaces of sky between them.

Tonight will bring the dream of fire in the theater
Where rancour drifts through the building
And at the exit, where the screaming should be,
We will trample each other in silence,
And no one get to safety
And no one yield in love.

iii: *The Tale of the House Swallow on Cape Ann*

A fluttering bird in the first soft heat of June,
She clung to the feathery elm, swinging and swinging,
Inviting a mate from the Massachusetts air.
(Each of us then is but the tally of a creature,
Plato's Aristophanes had said.)

But more than one mate came; they filled the warm sky
With dispute of her. For a long, fluttering while
She swayed on the tree-top, alone, swaying.
(The body is always looking for its other,
He said, though it is not bodies alone that mate.)

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What she did next made the whole party laugh.
Wanton, we called her, and husbands and wives took hands:
She was followed by six males into the dark birdhouse.
(In the dark we would solve impulsively the riddle
That even civilized Plato did not get right.)

There was no quarrelling in the birdhouse then.
We went in to dinner. Who hatched those eggs
With her, fed and fledged those little swallows
Aristophanes? Ah, he replies, the ghosting spirit
Is another, more jagged shape. This puzzle is not of flesh;

Many people in Massachusetts are moved by lust,
Their hearts yearn for unseemly fittings together
Which their minds disown. Man is aflutter
For the beautiful, Diotima told Socrates,
But the flesh is no more than an instance for the mind to consider.

iv: *Moral*

What is as wrong as the uninstructed heart?
Left to its ends, it clutches things and creatures
That can't be held, or held, will slip their natures;
It lives to hoard or to protect a hoard.
To school! To school! Teach the poor organ skill
That all its ignorant, nervous will
Does not unpage us like old calendars.
A life should be all gathering and art.

Let there be academies of everything,
That the trap in the warm kitchen yield to guile,
That grackles leave a fire single file,
And swallows find their true halves the first spring.
The mind should be, like art, a gathering
Where the red heart that fumes in the chest
Saying *kill, kill, kill* or *love, love, love,*
Gentled of the need to be possessed,
Can study a little the things that it dreams of.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

The Telephones

Burring, they intrude,
Saw-like, sharply, their otherness. We are centred
On our peace, our books, our plants,
And their music's insistence,
Demandingly, arrives; and explodes; and we race
To hear familiar voices, disembodied and placeless.

A ring: but the voice,
Indifferent maybe, pre-occupied, curt, nervous,
Tillages the estate of the house
With a kind of loquacious
Uncommunicativeness. Ourselves at the beck
And call each day of restless people—the dilatory, feckless,

Officious—and our own
Share in all these. A pattern, a permutation
Of citizens. Minuet
Where colleagues cohabit,
And acquaintances, in mere figures of the quotidian
Phases, modes of our molecule . . . But sometimes, extempore
planless,—

Far rarer calls,
Important with distance, splendid and major arrivals
That alight as if winged, come
Unharbingered, random—
Seeming, and in their giant abridgements ignite
Our grey ways with a strange warmth, untouching and lightless.

Instant though remote,
They tunnel the wires that tunnel our whole climate,
That vault the exposed moors'
Wet sibilant weathers,

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Diffusing their sad Aeolian across the ground
In a whine all day: but within, their hollow fires are the soundless

Aspect of the word
That arrives as a flash of rebirth; no sooner discovered
Than a part, almost at once,
Of pastness; a silence.
The glittering icon, the living person, gone
In a moment, to leave us a dove-grey daylight, gentle but sunless.

Strangeness that brings
The radiance of dullness: broad, sustained burnings
Dark as the coal: slow whorls
As the freighted petals
Of a black aster open. They spread, distend,
Until they hold the wind a moment that seems endless.

Aubade for a City

Colours of the wasp, the kaleidoscope of darkness
Tangles about me. Among the car's
Tangoes of light, I pace
The golden frost of the road's wet surface,
My footsteps ringing from wall to wall.
Those ebony cliffs rear my jungle.
Brilliant and dense,
The shops' electric gardens
Sheen on the asphalt.
The taste of the rain on my face is bitter, salt.

A planet of drenched enemies: not perilous
Because it is vacuous. I and my huddled fellows
Splash through the wet. Our trite havoc
Involves us. In imagination we must walk
Beyond the rim of dark, its glare be blent
In the pastel volumes of dawn, each of us inhabit

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The lucidities of daylight,
Its lame but lyrical reconcilement.

There, grey men see their faulty congruences,
Merging and social; abstract elegances,
A diagram of laws
Orderly and kindred, like a necklace, because
It is rich with the light of particularity.
Emeralds of selfhood;
Our noun of multitude;
The men in our city.

Terrible and delightful, both at once,
Among the fixities of our glassy canyons,
We spread, like slow and irresolute moving orchids,
The plain recurrence of men's daily deeds.
Something improbable, normality.
Fragments and flowers of a great buried tree
Enchanting the boredom of darkness, rain,
To burst, at a thousand places, up through our stony city.

WILLIAM STAFFORD

Lake Chelan

They call it regional, this relevance—
the deepest place we have: in this pool forms
the model of our land, a lonely one,
responsive to the wind. Everything we own
has brought us here: from here we speak.

The sun stalks among these peaks to sight
the lake down aisles, long like a gun;
a ferryboat, lost by a century, toots
for trappers, the pelt of the mountains
rinsed in the sun and that sound.

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Suppose a person far off to whom this lake
occurs: told a problem, he might hear a word
so dark he drowns an instant, and stands dumb
for the centuries of his country and the suave
hills beyond the stranger's sight.

Is this man dumb, then, for whom Chelan lives
in the wilderness? On the street you've seen
someone like a trapper's child pause,
and fill his eyes with some irrelevant flood—
a tide stops him, delayed in his job.

Permissive as a beach, he turns inland,
harks like a fire, glances through the dark
like an animal drinking, and arrives along that line
a lake has found far back in the hills,
the brim gravity exactly requires.

In the Night Desert

The Apache word for love twists
  then numbs the tongue:
Uttered once, clear, said—
  never that word again.

"Cousin," you call, or "Sister" and one
  more word that spins
In the dust: a talk-flake
  chipped like obsidian.

The girl who hears this flake and
  follows you into the dark
Turns at a touch: the night desert
  forever behind her back.

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HOLLIS SUMMERS

Seven Occasions for Song

I wish to make a speech on singing birds.
Unfortunately I make my speech in words,
Balanced on a cushion instead of a wing.
But, having been birds' friend and enemy,
Owning a tree and an anthology,
I know why birds sing.

Some sing to sing. Whether endowed
With fine or pitiable voices, they crowd
Heaven extempore, singing their sense
That sense involves a gut's mystique, and sound
Means melody. They exercise around
Each other, assuring themselves an audience.

Some sing to find out who they are,
And having found, they make a lyric game
Of calling themselves their own, their favorite name,
Until, alone, they feel like a seminar.
Their interest in themselves is genuine
Again, and again, and again, and again, and again.

Some trill brilliantly for sex
Employing a hundred kindred arts and tricks
Of dancing, rhetoric, and politics;
Fearful of remaining virginal wrecks
They sometimes sing their hearts out protesting
Love, loathing music, and hearts, and nesting.

Some, the delicately young and delicately old,
Call requesting comfort for their cold
Bodies and provisional minds among the seething
Currents of inhabited air, before flight
And after. They seek a small song breathing
Like sleep, before dawn, after night.

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Some shout agression, staking the land
They are, by God, determined to command;
They strike their boundaries of wormed sod
And infected space, refusing to defer
To any other feathers, including God:
Song is a dare wreaked out of anger.

Some trembling wary sentinels,
Skilled at reading a shadow's portents
Sing warning the race of enduring troubles
Inhabiting home's furtive elements;
They cry, "Beware," for horrors which hover, glide,
Tramp the world. They cry, "Beware," and hide.

And some sing a gathering call
After danger. As if danger had quit
The world for birds and song could forestall
Death, they sing a ceremony of infinite
Sky and a quiet tree and a day long
As life, shining, utterly fit for song.

And seven occasions become one occasion
And every bird sings from seven throats
His seven heavenly sins of every season;
Knowing he sings with only human vision
Composed of human measures and human notes
He finally sings for no final reason.

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FRANZ SCHNEIDER

Elis

from the German of Georg Trakl

1

Complete is the quiet of this golden day.
Under ancient oaks
You appear, Elis, resting with round eyes.

Their blueness mirrors the slumber of lovers.
At your mouth
Their rosy sighs were silenced.

At nightfall the fisherman hauled in the heavy nets.
A good shepherd
Leads his flock by the forest's edge.
O! how just, Elis, are all your days.

Quietly,
The olive tree's blue silence sinks down barren walls,
An old man's dark song dies away.

A golden boat,
Elis, your heart rocks in the lonely sky.

2

A gentle ringing of bells sounds in Elis' breast
At nightfall
When his head sinks into black pillows.

A blue deer
Bleeds quietly in the thorny briars.

A brown tree stands alone and dead;
Its blue fruits fell from it.

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Signs and stars
Sink quietly in the evening pond.

Behind the hill winter has come.

Blue doves
Drink at night the icy sweat
which runs from Elis' crystal brow.

Forever on black walls
Sings God's lonesome wind.

Love Poem

from the German of Karl Krolow

I speak to you with a low voice:
Will you hear me
Behind the bitter herb-face of the moon
Which decays?
Beneath the heavenly beauty of the air,
When the day comes,
And the dawn is a reddish fish with quivering fins?

You are fair.
Cool and dry is your skin.
Your gaze—gentle and sure as that of a bird.
I tell it to the whirling wind.
Your nape—do you hear—is of air
That slips through the mesh of blue leaves like doves.

You lift your face.
On the brick wall it shows once more as shadow.
Fair you are. You are fair.
Cool as water was your sleep by my side.
I speak to you with a low voice.
And the night crumbles like soda crystals, blue and black.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

The Troika

Troika, troika! The snow moon
whirls through the forest.

Where lamplight like a knife
gleams through a door, I see two graybeards bending.
They're playing chess, it seems. And then one rises
and stands in silence. Does he hear me passing?

Troika, troika! In the moonlight
his spirit sees my spirit passing.

I whip the horses on. The houses vanish.
The moon looks over fields
littered with debris. And there in trenches
the guardsmen stand, wind fluttering their rags.

And there were darker fields without a moon.
I walk across a field, bound on an errand.
The errand's forgotten—something depended on it.
A nightmare! I have lost my father's horses!

And then a white bird rises
and goes before me, hopping through the forest.

I held the bird—it vanished with a cry,
and on a branch a girl sat sideways, combing
her long black hair. The dew
shone on her lips; her breasts were white as roses.

Troika, troika! Three white horses,
a whip of silver, and my father's sleigh . . .

When morning breaks, the sea
gleams through the branches,
and the white bird, enchanted,
is flying through the world, across the sea.

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PAUL LEVINE

American Bards and Liberal Reviewers

VIRTUALLY ALL THE SIGNIFICANT attempts to define American culture for our times have been written by critics who call themselves liberals. Beginning with Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age* and Vernon Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* critical studies have argued, in Lionel Trilling's words, that there is an "inevitable intimate, if not always obvious, connection between literature and politics." American intellectual history, we are told, is essentially the history of the liberal political tradition, and there exists in our total culture a significant dialectic between the creative imagination and political experience. Only a decade ago Trilling maintained that "in the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition." More recently, Richard Chase went a step further. There "isn't any option," Chase asserted; "in politics we Americans are liberals or we are nothing."

Significantly, what Trilling and Chase mean by liberalism is something quite different from what the term meant to the older generation of Brooks and Parrington. For the older generation liberalism meant Jeffersonian democracy as opposed to Hamiltonian Federalism and it implied such movements, archaic-sounding to our ears, as "populism" and "agrarian reform." Brooks held that there existed a cultural dialectic between the "transcendental" and the pragmatic which would inevitably be resolved on the "genial middle ground" between "high-brow" and "low-brow." Parrington saw American history as the struggle between the liberal forces of freedom and the conservative forces of privilege. Both maintained with Jefferson that man is innately good and that, as Brooks wrote, "what marked the American imagination and set it off from others was a natural faith in the capacities of the average man."

The past two decades of American criticism have been dominated by a new kind of liberalism. Unable to accept Parrington's easy populism or Brooks's simple "highbrow-lowbrow" dialectic, these

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new critics—who include, aside from Trilling and Chase, Alfred Kazin, Leslie Fiedler, and Norman Podhoretz—have attempted to find the proper "complexity" in terms like "politics," "liberalism," and "culture." In keeping with the times they produce few big books but many short articles. Whereas the province of the New Critics is poetry, the domain of the new "liberal" critics is almost exclusively the novel because the novel involves "a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world." Although "liberal" critical essays appear in many magazines none epitomizes their outlook as much as *Partisan Review,* whose avowed purpose, according to Trilling, was "to organize a new union between our political ideas and our imagination—in all our cultural purview there is no work more necessary."

While each critic speaks from a different platform they all make similar assumptions about American society. Like *Partisan Review* they, too, are highly urbanized—New York Citified—and their birthright of independent radicalism and bittersweet alienation is influenced by a common cultural heritage which they have all embraced. But most of all, as Leslie Fiedler describes these critics,

> They are "political" in the European sense of the word, a sense that does not exist for most Americans. Not only do they have Marx, accepted or denied, in their blood, but also Freud in much the same way, as well as contemporary sociology, anthropology, and philosophy in general—so that they are likely to take sides passionately in any arguments about, say, existentialism or other recent European ideologies.

Thus the new "liberal" critics naturally differ from Parrington, the flag-waving Western populist, and Brooks, the liberal but proper Bostonian. Whereas the European influence stopped for Parrington with Rousseau, it only begins for our new critics with Marx and Freud. Their province is the academy and the metropolis and not Main Street or the farm, and though they recognize the greatness of Henry James and William Faulkner, they find more political complexity than actually appears in James and more remoteness from the American main stream than actually exists in Faulkner. Usually polemical, invariably erudite, and occasionally stimulating, these critics have replaced Parrington's exuberant optimism with a self-conscious pessimism, and his naive

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trust in the common man with a fear of populism in any form. In fact, they all seem united in their obsession with the haunted houses of the intellectuals: Trilling pulls Trotskyite skeletons out of the political closet while Fiedler discovers homosexual ghosts between the sheets of American novels and Norman Podhoretz finds in some mystical mutterings of the Beat Generation the seeds of populist mob rule and juvenile delinquency. Thus have our urbanized critics replaced Brooks's nostalgic social snobbery with a more intense variety of intellectual elitism by which they modestly assume the robes of martyrdom to fight the rearguard battle for civilization.

Happily, the most influential of the "liberal" critics is also the most interesting. When Lionel Trilling fired a salvo at Parrington's anti-intellectualism ("he expresses the chronic American belief that there exists an opposition between reality and mind and that one must enlist himself in the party of reality"), he was calling for a redefinition of the relation of politics to culture and art to reality. Trilling is concerned with bringing together again the elements of politics and creative imagination that have become separated in American culture. He is also disturbed by the fact that the ideas generated by a liberal democracy "have not infused with force and cogency the literature that embodies them." In other words, he cannot understand why a democratic society such as ours has produced a literature which is conservative and personal rather than liberal and socially conscious. He suggests that the reason may be found partly in what Henry James meant by the lack of social density in American society and partly in the American pragmatic imagination which concerns itself more with reality than ideas.

Trilling's great contribution lies in his attempt to redefine within a democratic framework the relationship between literature and politics so that we "force into our definition of politics every human activity and every subtlety of every human activity." For "unless we insist that politics is imagination and mind, we will learn that imagination and mind are politics, and of a kind that we will not like."

While Brooks actually presaged this idea in an inverted form in 1915 when he recognized "that the center of gravity in American affairs has shifted wholly from the plane of politics to the plane of

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psychology and morals," he failed to foresee that the intellectual would unconditionally relinquish his role as social conscience. This is precisely what disturbs Trilling. For he, too, has the characteristic new "liberal" fear of the "lowbrow" and of Parringtonian populism, preferring instead to let an educated intelligentsia create a climate of democratic enlightenment. Trilling was the first to write what F. O. Matthiessen's life had proved: that the position of the liberal and the intellectual (are they not synonymous in new "liberal" jargon?) is irrevocably alienated from the main stream of American life and that, in reality, the existence of magazines like *Partisan Review* in our midst is the cultural equivalent of the British colonial's habit of dressing for dinner in deepest Africa.

Trilling and those who followed him all attempted to divorce the intellectual and the academy from Main Street as they divided liberalism from the hurly-burly of political reality. Liberalism became for Trilling "a large tendency rather than a concise body of doctrine." He quotes Goethe who "says somewhere that there is no such thing as a liberal idea, that there are only liberal sentiments." (Richard Chase recently inverted Goethe's idea by maintaining that there is no conservative tradition in American politics because there have been no conservative ideas, only conservative impulses, within our radical democracy.) But behind this bifurcation lies a reservoir of fear and frustration. For even though liberalism is "not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition," as Trilling declared, and even though, as Chase insists, there "isn't any option—in politics we are liberals or we are nothing," the haunting thought persists that the American people have invariably distrusted the intellectual, the liberal, and the academy.

By attempting to separate liberalism from political reality Trilling comes perilously close to losing the meaning of both liberalism and politics. Just as he had criticized Parrington for enlisting "in the party of reality" to the exclusion of mind, so may we criticize Trilling for enlisting in the party of mind to the exclusion of reality. By using politics "in the wide sense of the word that is nowadays forced upon us," that is "as the politics of culture, the organization of human life toward some end or other, toward the modification of sentiments, which is to say the quality of human life," Trilling transports politics into that murky limbo where "liberalism is concerned with the emotions above all else, as proof of which the word

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happiness stands at the very center of its thought." In fact, the more Trilling tries to explain what he means by liberalism the less satisfactory his explanation becomes. With obvious reluctance, Trilling wrote in his Preface to *The Liberal Imagination:* "Attempts to define liberalism are not likely to meet with success—I mean only that our educated class has a ready if mild suspiciousness of the profit motive, a belief in progress, science, social legislation, planning, and international cooperation, perhaps especially where Russia is in question." Trilling's faith in an "educated class," his academic distrust of pragmatic politics, and his slightly pompous "ready if mild suspiciousness of the profit motive" betray the prejudices not of a radical liberal but of a moderately progressive professor of literature and an essentially conservative entrepreneur of book club dividends.

Despite the sensitivity of his critical analysis, the mellow Arnoldian flavor of his prose, and the deep sincerity of his feelings, Trilling is ultimately a limited observer of the American scene. His inability to read the novel in any but realistic terms and his myopic sympathy for Freud's but not Calvin's image of man's limitations deprives him of any real *engagement* with American literature and culture. A striking example of the cosmopolitan provincial, he cannot conceive of an America extending beyond the confines of New York City. For how else could he write that "of our novelists today perhaps only William Faulkner deals with society as a field of tragic reality and he has the disadvantage of being limited to a provincial scene"? Perhaps there is even some truth in Alfred Kazin's caustic criticism of "critics like Lionel Trilling, who lament that America is socially not complex enough to produce the kind of nineteenth-century novels they have studied and taught all their lives." ("Liberal" critics nowadays seem to alternate between scratching and biting each other's backs.) In any case, the basic failure in Lionel Trilling's criticism is a chronic inability to accept the totality of American society as it actually exists.

I believe it was Stanley Edgar Hyman who put Alfred Kazin "at the low end of the scale" of critics along with Henri Peyre and J. Donald Adams. Perhaps Mr. Hyman went too far but, certainly, it was Kazin's misfortune to have written too much too soon and what we publish in haste we often regret at leisure.

And yet, *On Native Grounds,* Kazin's major effort, which he

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wrote while still in his twenties, has its champions. As sensitive a critic as R. W. B. Lewis has called it "the most stimulating and informative general account of literature of all kinds since 1900." Even Lewis conceded, however, that the "book is ridden by a thesis about what constitutes authentically native grounds which is so dubious that it forces him to deal unfairly, even ineptly, with many of the key figures." *On Native Grounds* actually presents two theses, both of which Kazin beats into his native ground. First, he feels that *real* American literature is the indigenous strain that runs from Emerson through Twain and Dreiser to poets like Sandburg and Robert Frost. (The same happy quality, the author intimates with characteristic modesty, which is lacking in the criticism of T. S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, and R. P. Blackmur—to mention only four names—is present in the work of Alfred Kazin—to mention only one.) Second, he maintains that "our modern literature came out of those great critical years of the late nineteenth century which saw the emergence of Modern America, and was molded in its struggles. It is upon this elementary and visible truth—almost too elementary and visible, so close are we still to its crucible—that this book is based."

Now neither of Kazin's theses seems particularly elementary or visible. There surely *is* an indigenous strain in American literature but to define it without recourse to the indigenous elements of our culture, such as Puritanism, seems to me virtually impossible. It is similarly dangerous to assume that "modern literature" —by which Kazin characteristically means "realism"—sprang full-grown to answer the challenge of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. For "modern literature"—which I take to mean Faulkner as well as Dreiser, Eliot as well as Sandburg, and *Nightwood* as well as *Babbitt*—is the product of many factors. We can no more ignore the influence of Southern folklore on Faulkner or of Greek drama upon Eliot than we can overlook the fact that a supposedly non-indigenous type like Eliot has influenced the course of modern literature more than an indigenous type like Sandburg. Indeed, it seems significant that the writers who serve Kazin's thesis least have served American literature best: James the Anglophile, Hemingway the expatriate, and Faulker the provincial all seem less to the point of *On Native Grounds* than do William Dean Howells or Hamlin Garland or Theodore Dreiser.

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Like Trilling, Kazin seems to suffer from a kind of cultural astigmatism: both fail to see the total reality of American life. Leaning heavily upon that narrowly "liberal" tradition which defines modern literature in terms of realism and art in terms of social relevance, *On Native Grounds* fails to inspire confidence in its author's sensibility primarily because of its lopsided vision of American life. Only this might account for Kazin's frantic attack upon the New Critics or his belief that "Faulkner's tobacco-drooling phantoms are not the constituents of a representative American epic, protagonists in a great modern tragedy; they are the tonal expression of Faulkner's own torment, the walking phantasmagoria, sensation beating against sensation, of his perpetual tension." Ultimately, *On Native Grounds* is valuable not for its ideas or vision of American literature but for the factual material that its author has amassed about some minor realists. I for one would gladly trade all of Kazin's data for a single perception about Henry James.

The years since *On Native Grounds* first appeared have treated Kazin fairly well. His criticism seems to have mellowed and matured. Recent utterances on Faulkner, for instance, contain no "tobacco-drooling phantoms," and some of his latest articles have revealed a greater sensitivity than Kazin would have seemed to possess. Yet there remains in his criticism a curious inability to see beneath the surface of things: as in his remark that "our earlier twentieth-century American fiction seemed to carry the whole weight of our society; now it has the effect of exquisitely studying personal problems alone—by which I mean that the characters in contemporary American novels do not criticize the world they live in, and have no thought of changing it, as fish live in the sea and keep their own counsel." At times like these, it is clear that Kazin has never left his native grounds.

Thorstein Veblen once remarked that the Jew "is a sceptic by force of circumstances over which he has no control. . . . He becomes a disturber of the intellectual peace, but only at the cost of becoming an intellectual wayfaring man, a wanderer in the intellectual no-man's land, seeking another place to rest, farther along the road, somewhere over the horizon." No better description of Leslie Fiedler has ever been written. Fiedler is by far the most flamboyant example of the new "liberal" critic in all his excesses.

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In a way, he seems an artistic creation (as Jay Gatsby was an imaginative rendering of James Gatz), a brilliant caricature of the All-American *Partisan Review* critic: the New York-Disillusioned-Intellectual-Alienated-Jewish-Polemical-Sophisticated Provincial.

The appearance of *An End to Innocence* caused something of a stir in intellectual circles. Fiedler's pungent, polemical style expressed a point-of-view which seemed original and stimulating: here was a liberal attacking liberal complacency and naiveté. Yet when the glossy surface is penetrated, the substance of *An End to Innocence* reveals itself as alternately brittle and flabby. Fiedler's ideas lead into the most fascinating *cul de sac* in the entire "liberal" tradition. In the end he stands for almost nothing.

His political essays—on the Hiss and Rosenberg trials and Senator McCarthy's bizarre career—purported to expose the guises of liberalism's self-imposed innocence and demanded that the liberal assume his share of the political guilt accumulated over the past three decades. It is an honorable purpose backed up by a true insight perhaps suggested by Trilling's observation that while many intellectuals have indulged themselves in moral righteousness few have committed themselves to the kind of moral realism which questions the motives that lie behind our "good impulses." Trilling was attempting to re-evaluate the liberal tradition from the viewpoint of "moral realism" and Fiedler appears to be doing the same thing. But whereas Trilling went on to construct a new relationship between art and politics, Fiedler seems content merely to demolish the old platitudes. When Fiedler finally defines his brand of liberalism in his essay on "McCarthy and the Intellectuals" he leaves no alternative to his kind of unconstructive criticism. He writes reluctantly:

> I cannot in all honesty resist defining this term, though I should have preferred to leave its meaning implicit. To describe the allegiances of the group is to define it sufficiently; but it is perhaps wise to forestall objections by stating explicitly that I use the word "liberal" (and "intellectual" is, for better or worse, historically synonymous with it in America) to mean all those who believe or believed that Sacco was innocent, who considered the recognition of the Soviet Union not merely wise strategically but a "progressive" step, and who identified themselves with the Loyalist side during the Spanish Civil War. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that I consider myself one of this group.

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The disturbing thing is not so much that Fiedler's image of liberalism is closer to the Popular Front image of the Thirties than to Parrington's populism—indeed, Fiedler seems to think that nobody can be a liberal until he has been at least a disgruntled fellow traveller—but that he insists on re-fighting all the lost causes of the Depression decade. What Fiedler really means is that with the death of Communism as an ideal the liberal has discovered that there are no political causes left in which he may believe. But by making the liberal relinquish all causes, Fiedler has rendered him apolitical and unconstructive. Now all he can do is seek after "Truth" because that is never wrong and he has been profoundly wrong once. While there is nothing dishonorable in seeking after "Truth," surely the search is not restricted to liberals. Unless, of course, Diogenes was an ex-Trotskyite, too.

If the early essays in *An End to Innocence* made it clear that political ideals were dead, then the later essays indicated that the "liberal" critic had better light out for the socio-psychological territory ahead. This point was established in a controversial essay, "Come Back to the Raft, Ag'in, Huck Honey!" which, Fiedler later explained, was "an attempt to define a central American *mythos* of love in which the lover is an outcast or orphan and the beloved a dark-skinned primitive male." From this kernel evolved Fiedler's major critical work, *Love and Death in the American Novel.*

In bulk, *Love and Death* can almost compete with any book on American literature: *Main Currents in American Thought, Makers and Finders* or *American Renaissance.* It differs, however, from these works in its synthesis: it purports to "emphasize the neglected contexts of American fiction, largely depth psychological and anthropological, but sociological and formal as well." Fiedler finds that American literature is derived from the European novel at two levels. Our popular middle-brow literature, from *Charlotte Temple* through *Marjorie Morningstar,* stems from the Richardsonian archetype of the sentimental novel, *Clarissa.* Its subject is love and its treatment is a sentimentalized corruption of the archetypal situation of seduction. On the other hand, the great tradition of American fiction, from Charles Brockden Brown through Hawthorne, Melville, Poe and Twain to Faulkner and Hemingway, grows out of the archetypal Gothic novel, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto.* It represents the flight

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from the stifling middle-browism of female-dominated American society and "the search for an innocent substitute for adulterous passion and marriage alike." That search inevitably ends for the American novelist in "impotence," "unconsummated incest," or in "innocent homosexuality."

Fiedler's book is an ambitious attempt to come to grips with the difficult subject of love in the American novel. It contains useful information about many minor novels, tries properly to relate the American novel to contemporary developments in Europe, and has some stimulating things to say about the Gothic aspects of our fiction. At the same time, it is one of the most erratic and depressingly bad jobs of criticism to come along in some time. Taking as his thesis a lumpy blend of Freudian symbolism, Jungian archetypes and Lawrentian insights (one wonders how Lawrence, who disagreed with Freud and disparaged Jung, would have reacted to this) Fiedler proceeds to apply it literally and indiscriminately to all of American literature. The result is a monstrous allegory of "dirty" Freudianism which ignores explicit values in favor of obscurantist and irrelevant ones. The consequence is criticism that is quantitative rather than qualitative, mechanical rather than stimulating, reductive rather than explorative, and, ultimately, boring rather than shocking. In this Fiedlerian allegory *all* male friendship is "homoerotic," *all* familial love "incestuous," and *agape* in general becomes *eros* in particular:

> The orthodox Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost has yielded in art and the popular imagination to the Baroque trinity, derived ultimately from Venus, Vulcan, and Cupid, and still, despite the new names of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, what it always was: an archetypal representation of cuckold, mother, and son, the last degradation of fatherhood.

To make matters worse, Fiedler has claimed all literature as his province and thereby steps into several areas that are clearly out of his depth. For instance, he analyzes the medieval courtly love tradition (relying heavily on C. S. Lewis' *The Allegory of Love*) without any awareness of the growing body of recent scholarship that contests the whole notion of Courtly Love. Then, in discussing the English novel, he mistakes Richardson's Pamela for a "governess" (just before smugly taking another critic to task

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for getting the plot of *Clarissa* wrong), misreads Fielding's *Tom Jones,* and calls *Clarissa* "a study of the ambiguities of motivation unequaled until Proust" (which makes one wonder exactly what novels Fiedler has been reading).

When Fiedler returns to his native grounds he creates out of American literature a world more Gothic than any novel he describes. Clearly he is indebted to D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* for his mythic framework. Lawrence, however, used the idyllic "love" between Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook to underscore his main point: the search for a new psyche within a heritage of guilt and innocence. For Fiedler, on the other hand, the homosexual love *is* the point. It is as if, to adapt E. B. White's apt phrase, Fiedler had brought American literature down to earth—and then broken its arm. For he depicts a nightmarish realm landscaped by "Hawthorne's life-long obsession with the subject [of incest]," by the "necrophiliac titillation" of Henry James, by the implied homosexuality of Dreiser, and by "the fear of full genitality and the desire for self-destruction which possesses" J. D. Salinger. No wonder he finds a literature in which Hawthorne "peoples his tales . . . with a succession of genital cripples," in which "Strether represents [in James's *The Ambassadors*] the supreme attempt to make of the voyeur a hero and moral guide," in which Faulkner, in the scenes in *Sanctuary* where an impotent Popeye watches Temple Drake make love, "is projecting a brutal travesty of the American artist, helpless and fascinated before the fact of genital love," and in which the long legs of a Nathanael West heroine are metamorphosed into "those improbable legs which America has bred onto the naturally short-legged female form to symbolize castrating power." After critical observations like these, mere inaccuracies (calling Eula Varner "the *femme fatale* as a small, fat girl," misdating Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*) come as a kind of comic relief.

What I am questioning is not the use of Freudian interpretation but Fiedler's abuse of it. His frantic search for a homosexual *mythos*—with its methods of distortion, assertion, and innuendo —smacks of a bizarre parody of the McCarthy witch hunts: a sad, ironic note considering his essay on the late Senator. One wonders if the failure of love as Fiedler describes it is unique in American

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fiction or if his methods would uncover a European literature more heterosexually vital. Already he has noted "a tradition of the pseudo-marriage of males, stretching from, say, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza through Leporello and Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe and Friday to Pickwick and Sam Weller." Shakespeare is mentioned as being possibly limp of wrist; what couldn't be done with Proust, Gide, Mann, and Kafka? Surely, even *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina* reveal a less than "full genitality" in the handling of sexual matters, a definite falling-off from the Marquis de Sade. Ultimately, I suspect that Mr. Fiedler's work will serve as a model of critical tact long after Freud and Lawrence, Melville and Hawthorne are forgotten—and not until then.

If Fiedler's criticism reveals not only an end to innocence but to a mature and flexible kind of enlightened criticism, then Richard Chase's recent books reflect an attempt to reconstruct the liberal imagination upon Trilling's old terms. Chase seems to be an amiable man: he has a good word to say about everybody. Even when he comes upon something he doesn't like he can get around it by pretending that it doesn't exist. Thus he doesn't have to criticize the conservatives because he can prove that there is no conservative tradition in America. But if Chase has the gentlest tongue, he was also blessed with the least inspired pen. He writes sloppily and perhaps too quickly (three books in four years) and seems to derive little pleasure from writing. An intelligent and sympathetic critic, Chase is hampered as much by his tradition as he is by his own shortcomings.

Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition,* too, has its supporters. Recently Norman Podhoretz seemed to attack *The Territory Ahead,* a stimulating study of American literature by novelist Wright Morris, for not being more like Chase's book. But the sad fact remains that *The American Novel and Its Tradition* is a hasty job, one that presents an interesting if not entirely original thesis about the American novel's distinguishing characteristics and then proceeds to say very little about American novels.

Chase's thesis is that "the American novel tends to rest in contradictions and among extreme ranges of experience" and that though it is obviously a development from the English tradition (at least until 1880) "the profound poetry of disorder we find in

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the American novel is missing, with rare exceptions, from the English." Thus the American novel, with its preoccupation with myth, symbol, allegory, its preference for action over character, and its cavalier attitude towards "reality," is actually closer to the romance than to the conventional novel of manners. This formulation of the romance is, of course, not new to American criticism. As Chase himself acknowledges, both Hawthorne and James made the same distinction between the novel and the romance while more recently Trilling observed it in his essay on "Manners, Morals, and the Novel." But whereas Trilling sought to reconcile these contrarieties in favor of realism, Chase finds that the contradictions are the real basis of our literature.

Chase's particular version of the American romance is, however, open to several criticisms. Like most "liberal" critics, he first secularizes New England Puritanism and then dismisses too lightly its influence on the developing American imagination. Then, in his eagerness to include every major novelist, Chase stretches the definition of the romance beyond usefulness. For instance, he indicates that James consciously assimilated elements of the romance into *The Portrait of a Lady* by introducing a romantic heroine, Isabel Archer. But creating a romantic character is quite different from creating a romance, as *Madame Bovary* shows. And, finally, he ignores the European influence which Leslie Fiedler has since pointed out in *Love and Death in the American Novel.*

But Chase's biggest shortcoming is that after stating his thesis in the opening chapters, he fails, in the succeeding chapters, to cast new light on either the thesis or the novels under discussion. Indeed, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* succeeds in adding little or nothing to our knowledge of American novels or their tradition. Instead, we are treated to a competent review of scholarship rather than an original contribution to criticism. In his chapter on Cooper, for instance, we find many of the excellent insights of D. H. Lawrence, while some of F. O. Matthiessen's observations seem to haunt the sections on Hawthorne and Melville. In Chase's analysis of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury,* too, the only insights are culled from Olga Vickery's fine essay in *PMLA.* If there is little to object to in *The American Novel and Its Tradition* there is also little to applaud. I cannot under-

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stand why anyone would want Wright Morris to write a book more like this one. For the best part Hawthorne, James, and Trilling already have.

Chase's recent work, *The Democratic Vista,* which was treated most respectfully by the reviewers, purports to be "a radical reconsideration of American culture, particularly but by no means exclusively its political and literary aspects," and is told in the form of a Platonic dialogue. It is also one of the most inept books to come along in several years. Chase has gathered a random sampling of American culture for a September week-end in New Hampshire with results that only S. J. Perelman might equal but not surpass. The main characters are: Professor Ralph Headstrong, a middle-aged radical and intellectual who "usually speaks for the author"; George Middleby, thirtyish "solid citizen of the new generation" who represents the moderate voice; Maggie Motive, "a glamorous amateur and woman of projects, out of the gay past" of the nineteen-twenties who resembles an improbable crossing of Dorothy Parker, Mary McCarthy and Claire Booth Luce; and Rinaldo Schultz, "optimist, engineer, and newly naturalized American" who is, I suppose, a naive mixture of Huck Finn and de Toqueville but whose accumulated knowledge of American civilization would intimidate even Perry Miller. As you can see, Chase has deftly named many of his characters to suggest their intellectual positions: a veritable *tour de force.*

It would be pointless to enumerate all of the embarrassing things in this book. Chase's unerring ear for the commonplace—"in history everything capable of clarity is made clear"—is matched only by his sharp eye for inelegant prose. One can only wonder at the reasons that led him to present his arguments in such a ridiculous way, for even they deserve a better fate than this. Chase maintains that critics have always seen the contradictions in American culture but that they have mistakenly attempted to resolve them in terms of Brooks's "genial middle ground." The real vitality of American culture, however, derives precisely from its dialectic; a resolution in terms of compromise can only mean a loss of culture. Here Chase has made a shrewd observation about the predicament into which critics since Brooks have fallen. Unfortunately, he goes on to create an arbitrary and non-existent dialectic of his own which inevitably subverts his so-called radicalism.

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Perhaps it is significant that on the Sunday morning Headstrong-Chase presents this dialectic he is nursing a mild hangover. Headstrong argues that "the energizing dialectic of American life is the opposition of [liberal] idea to [conservative] instinct or impulse." Since America's long history of radical democracy precludes any "relevant theory of conservatism" like Edmund Burke's in England, there really "isn't an option—in politics we Americans are liberals or we are nothing."

Headstrong's dialectic is questionable on two counts. First, the idea of defining conservatism only in terms of Burke is arbitrary; conservatism, after all, has a relative sense, too. More important, the distinction between liberal ideas and conservative impulses is entirely artificial. Even Emerson perceived this when he observed that "the theory of politics which has possessed the mind of men, and which they have expressed the best way they could in their laws and in their revolutions, considers persons and property as the two objects for whose protection government exists." But the conservative concern for property rights with its corollary that those who possess the most should have the greatest stake in governing ("What's good for General Motors is good for the country!"), is no more an impulse than the liberal belief in the sanctity of personal rights.

If Chase's concept of the conservative impulse seems inadequate, his idea of "radical values" is little better. They are "the virtue of truth-telling" and "the liberal heritage of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as this is given political expression in our Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights and cultural expression by our imaginative writers." Since by now most of us have accepted "the virtue of truth-telling" along with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Chase seems to have defined a vaguely moderate position. If we were ever in doubt about Chase's moderation, he reassures us in perhaps the most telling paragraph in the book. Whereas Trilling sought to unite politics and creative imagination under the latter's banner, Chase finds the split between politics and culture both irrevocable and desirable.

> But as for our American situation, it is a matter of tempo and the deployment of forces in accordance with what the historical situation demands. In the 1930's the advance shock troops of the radical movement were political, because it was specifically the political function

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> that was in desperate need of reform. The general culture, in contrast to that of our day, was by no means in bad shape. Now the situation is reversed. The very success of the political and economic system, illusory as this may prove to be, has been won at the cost of a general desolation of culture. We have become rich at the cost of learning how to live, for where you [George] see among ordinary Americans a new aesthetic expertness and a new interest in the art of living, I see merely a nervous desire to consume anything and everything that can be consumed, a shallow and dreary epicureanism. For these reasons, the first task of radicalism nowadays is directly cultural and only indirectly political and economic. If this be contradictory, let us consider it to be one of the invigorating contradictions we live with, in a civilization that defines itself, on the rare occasions when it has the courage to do so, by its contradictions.

While I am still unsure about those rare occasions when a civilization defines itself, it seems clear that the invigorating contradictions are all Chase's. His is a remarkable statement for a confessed radical to make, not only because it upholds the political *status quo* but because it virtually denies that liberalism (synonymous with radicalism for Chase) has any relevant political meaning today. What makes *The Democratic Vista* politically radical is the fact that it completely does away with politics. Which shows what happens when a literary critic strays from his native grounds.

When Diana Trilling wrote a recent *Partisan Review* article as an open letter to Norman Podhoretz, it became clear that this young critic, who has since become the editor of *Commentary,* wore the robes of heir apparent to the "liberal" critical throne. Indeed, young Podhoretz had earned the right. His criticism, incisive but erratic, is characterized by the same idiosyncrasies that mar the entire new "liberal" tradition. For though Podhoretz is barely thirty he writes from the perspective of a depressed Depression decade radical.

Podhoretz's nostalgia for the Depression is most apparent in an article written for *The New Leader* in which he chides the young generation of American intellectuals for shying away from experience. While Podhoretz never makes clear what he means by "experience"—surely, his last-minute plea for a mass dunking in the Plaza Hotel fountain falls short of one's expectations—it seems to be irrevocably tied up with the variety of political experience found in the Thirties. The chief fault with the young intellectuals, aside from the fact that they "know nothing, stand

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for nothing, believe in nothing" (which means they know, stand for, and believe in nothing that Podhoretz knows, stands for, and believes in), is that "none of them came to maturity during the depression." They "never had any personal involvement with radicalism, were neither a prey to the illusions nor a beneficiary of the seriousness that together gave the intellectual life of the '30's its special force."

Podhoretz treats his generation as if it had been deprived of a normal childhood by missing the Depression. Of course, there is something ironic in his nostalgic celebration of the Thirties, possibly because he himself was too young to participate actively (Podhoretz was ten in 1940). In fact, there is an unfortunate habit among "liberals" to glamorize the Depression—a great big intellectual clam bake without clams—and a correlative tendency to belittle the present-day belief in security, conventionality, and the "moral" rather than the "political" life. While today's tendency towards too much conformity is good for neither the individual nor society, Podhoretz's alternative of an anachronistic political radicalism does not seem much better. If the present generation does not share his enthusiasm for the Thirties I don't think it can be faulted. The radical legacy of disillusionment, anguish, and alienation is very little to build on.

Podhoretz's literary criticism is, however, more illuminating than his political analysis. A *Partisan Review* article on the Beat Generation was brilliant in exposing its beatnik ineptness. But even here there was an unfortunate tendency to identify the Beat Generation with populism (a dirty word in "liberal" parlance these days), anti-intellectualism, and even the rise of juvenile delinquency which both misrepresented the Beats and graced them with more importance than they deserve. His book reviews, too, alternate between sublimity and ridiculousness: a silly attack on *The Territory Ahead* because Wright Morris ignored Richard Chase's thesis is followed by a sympathetic analysis of Saul Bellow's difficult *Henderson the Rain King*. In another review he myopically reads Frederick Buechner's *The Return of Ansel Gibbs* as a straight political novel, completely ignoring the Christian implications which are the heart of this deeply religious writer's theme, while treating Bernard Malamud's well-written but modest book of short stories, *The Magic Barrel*, as if it were *War and Peace*.

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Although Podhoretz has yet to write a really significant piece of criticism, there is little doubt that he is capable of doing so. He is a sensitive reader and a skillful writer. But just how significant a critic he will become depends on whether he can wrest himself from the faults of the "liberal" tradition which he is following. Reading Podhoretz could then become a constant, instead of an intermittent, pleasure.

For some time now the idea has lingered in academic circles that this is an age of criticism. The novel is dead, we are told, and the literary critic has replaced the novelist as the most effective commentator upon the American scene. I personally cannot agree with these eminent critics who, like smug pall bearers, come to bury contemporary literature and not to praise it. But at a time like this, when modes of fiction, like forms of culture, are in a period of transition, the craft of criticism could become increasingly important. "The razor's edge becomes a saw to the armed vision," Coleridge observed about the uses of criticism. To the unarmed or disarmed vision, however, the razor's edge may become just another meat cleaver. The vision of the critic today must be encouraging as well as armed; his mind must be sympathetic as well as open.

The present "liberal" critics are seldom encouraging and their minds are rarely open. R. P. Blackmur once warned:

> The worse evil of all fanatic falsification—of arrogant irrationality and barbarism in all its forms—arises when a body of criticism is governed by an *idée fixe,* a really exaggerated heresy, when a notion of genuine but small scope is taken literally as of a universal application. This is the body of tendentious criticism where, since something is assumed proved before the evidence is in, distortation, vitiation, and absolute assertion become supreme virtues.

The shoe of Blackmur's criticism certainly fits the flat feet of these "liberal" critics. Trilling's original idea that the intellectual and liberal are one in this country is an exaggerated heresy which reaches heroic proportions in Fiedler's variation that the Jew is now the American cultural hero; Trilling's willful uniting of politics and imagination is capriciously inverted in Chase's arbitrary separation of politics and culture. Though the political implications of a work of art are often important, more often they are not. As Blackmur also points out, "the themes of great art

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have seldom lent themselves to propaganda for an economic insight, finding, as it happened, religious, moral, or psychological—that is to say, interpretive—insights more appropriate impulses."

The final irony is that the new "liberal" tradition is not liberal at all. Rather, it is a hodgepodge of cultural elitism, disappointed Marxism, romping Freudianism, self-conscious Judaism, and academic frustration. But what kind of liberal speaks obsessively of Trotsky and never mentions Jefferson, as Fiedler does, or blithely divorces liberalism from politics, as Trilling does, or consciously divides politics from culture, as Chase does? This "liberalism" cannot escape the shadows of the Thirties and all that decade meant. Too often "liberal" criticism is born not out of love but out of petty irritation; too often the "liberal" critic fails to accept an honest artistic endeavor on its own terms and insists on applying almost irrelevant criteria. Too often "liberal" critics sound like Herod in W. H. Auden's *For The Time Being,* who concludes: "I object. I'm a liberal. I want everyone to be happy. I wish I had never been born."

Notes on Contributors

A new collection of essays by HERBERT GOLD, *The Age of Happy Problems,* will be published by Dial Press this Summer.

FREDERICK SEIDEL has recently won the Helen Burlin Memorial Award given by the YMHA Poetry Center.

MAXINE KUMIN's first book of poems, *Halfway,* was published last year by Holt, Rinehart & Winston. She is on a grant from the Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study.

HAROLD WITT's fourth book of poetry, *Beasts in Clothes,* was published last Fall by Macmillan.

ROBERT BLY's first book of poems, *A Silence in the Snowy Fields,* will be published this Fall by Wesleyan.

WILLIAM MEREDITH, author of *The Open Sea and Other Poems,* teaches at Connecticut College.

A collection of essays by JOHN HOLLOWAY, *The Chartered Mirror,* has just been published by Horizon Press.

A collection of WILLIAM STAFFORD's poems will be published next Fall by Harper's.

HOLLIS SUMMERS teaches Contemporary Poetry and Fiction at Ohio University. He is the author of three novels and a book of poems, *The Walks Near Athens.*

FRANZ SCHNEIDER is the co-translator, with Charles Gullans, of "Last Letters from Stalingrad," published in the Autumn issue of this Review.

PAUL LEVINE is in Copenhagen, Denmark, on an American-Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship and is currently at work on a book of criticism about the last two decades in American fiction.

B. H. HAGGIN and JOHN SIMON write about Music and Theatre regularly for this Review.

(Continued on page 160)

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Colette and Strether

COLETTE'S MOTHER HAD A WORD OF ADVICE for her children: *Regarde.* It became Colette's lifelong advice to herself, and her most characteristic impulse; and it provides the author of a recent book on her work with the occasion for proposing a fashionable and honorific comparison. "There is a certain similarity," says Miss Marks, "between the word *'Regarde'* as used by Colette and the word 'Live' as used by Lambert Strether in . . . *The Ambassadors.* . . . Despite James's greater subtlety, both he and Colette use these imperatives to describe a necessary attitude toward life, an attitude which demands that one be alert and receptive to the incidents and impressions of one's experience."[1]

This nervous curtsy toward James, as toward Olympus, is instructive, not because it discloses anything about Colette and her ethical affinities with the masters, but because it is dictated by the current critical platitudes about fiction and, more particularly, by the suspicion, not yet laid to rest among her readers in the English-speaking countries, that Colette is not quite Olympian; if, then, we can ring in a similarity to James . . .

But the comparison will not do. In the first place, *The Ambassadors* is a grandly ambitious novel, incomparably more ambitious than any of Colette's, just as Strether is an incomparably more ambitious effort than any fictional image, including herself in the part of narrator and sage, that occurs to Colette. Besides there is, in Colette, no "subtlety" of the sort diffused by Strether's anguished repudiation of his past.

As James himself tells us in his Preface, Strether is at this point in "a false position": mistaking the nature of Chad's change and of his relation with Mme. de Vionnet, Strether sees Chad as life's darling and himself as, self-revealed and self-indicted, the very emblem of failure. James intends the outcry to mark one of many moments of partial and victoriously accumulating insights on Strether's way to fullness of illumination, but this one a moment of premature and unwarranted judgment also, later to be ruefully corrected. Strether is wrong, and his imperative —far from explaining itself (as Colette's does) or suggesting what one must do to measure up to it—explains nothing and suggests only those undefined and glittering satisfactions which the poor man, genuflecting before his misconception of Chad and Mme. de Vionnet, imagines he has missed forever. The question may even arise whether Strether's imperative suffers from what in his Preface James deplores, "ambiguities of sense," as well as from what he actively seeks, "ambiguities of appearance": it is certain that Strether, for one, does not know what he means; and neither, perhaps, does James, faced as he is with his unsolved prob-

[1] COLETTE, by *Elaine Marks.* Rutgers University Press, 1960, p. 239.

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lem of dramatizing the cause of all the soul-searchings, Chad's much touted glamor.

If, indeed, Miss Marks had chosen, not to perform the ritual obeisance to James, but instead to bring *The Ambassadors* into possible relation with Colette, she might have called attention to an authentic parallel: between James's Chad and Colette's Chéri. Each hero-villain is intended as the superb but fatally self-loving product of a sentimental education, the myth of the man who has learned too well from a woman. Chad onstage, however, is nothing better than a languid prig out of drawing-room comedy, he has neither wit nor distinction nor power of presence, and so no power to make us believe in the myth for the exploring of which James has constructed his whole immense labyrinth of a novel. It is Colette, working on a scale so much more modest as to daunt comparison, who proves the myth in the words and conduct of the beautiful young man himself, the wilful, magnetic, and doomed figure of Chéri. Colette's imperative directs us from abstraction toward the source of all myth, human conduct, Chéri's, Léa's, Edmée's, Mme. Peloux's; it sums up the novelist's intensity of preoccupation with the particularity of things; it acknowledges the intention to live only as this manifests itself in the act of living; and it has no arbitrary secrets. Strether's imperative, on the other hand, and the myth on which it is designed to throw a partial light, are labels without packages, signs in the direction of non-existent localities; they are atmospheres waiting for objects; they vaporize at length into such random particles of speculation as are sometimes confused with subtlety, and liable to be designated by the term "ambiguity" (though whether of sense or merely of appearance, the devotee of James is unlikely to inquire).

Of pretentious and unsolvable puzzles Colette is innocent; and so she has little charm for the Jamesians, the Don Quixotes of academic criticism. Nor, since she defies classification, is she more appealing to those Sancho Panzas, the trend-spotting, talent-leveling critics: in an up-to-date, microscopically thorough survey of 20th-century French fiction, in which such names as Bosco, Aymé, Green, and Saint-Exupéry achieve the dignity of sub-chapters and the rank of novelists who "effectively created a new image of man for their age," Colette is dismissed in a single parenthesis of baffled compliment.[2] She is too direct and exact to foster the illusion of withheld mysteries, or the illusion of easy identifiability.

Her mother—the engaging, not quite domesticated Sido of Colette's autobiographical books—told her to "Look," and, finding it good and unambiguous advice, she looks, she misses nothing, and she reports what she sees. The hard and tranquil simplicity of her idiom is unique

[2] "It is true that some novelists, Colette among the best, remain aloof from the principal currents of the time, stubbornly resisting any attempt at generalization." AN AGE OF FICTION, by *G. Brée and M. Guiton*. Rutgers University Press, 1957, p. 3.

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in fiction: small wonder that Colette is not comfortably accommodated into literary histories. Though Proust, Gide, and Valéry were early and discriminating admirers of her work, and though during the last decade of her life—that long-deserved apotheosis—she was inundated with the homage of the contemporary great, she seems to have no antecedents in her own language except the rational genius of the language itself, especially during the great age of its autocratic candor and purity; the unblinking language, for instance, of her mother's favorite reading, Saint-Simon's *Memoirs* of manners at the court of the Sun-King.

Still, to say as much is already to be obliged to draw back and take account of emotional intensities in Colette's fiction that derive from no allegiance to good form or *la gloire,* that seem neither splendid outcomes nor violations of a Racinian code of manners or of any social code, but private problems rather, passions in isolation and solitude, trials of the spirit that test not conventional but natural limits. Colette is classical only in the balance and order of her idiom. Her subjects are certainly not classical, but as she sees them they are not finally romantic either: if her subjects are, in the romantic tradition, human solitude and the claims of sexuality, she regards solitude only as the given, and she neither demeans nor etherealizes sexuality; the romantic exaltation and the romantic agony equally, she leaves to those of her characters who know and can learn no better.

In this single aspect, Colette resembles D. H. Lawrence—not, it is worth insisting, because they both deal with the sexual relation, but because they share and dramatize the conviction that to give sexuality its due is to see it as the most complicated and most characteristic manifestation of individuality, that to etherealize it may be quite as debilitating for the spirit as to demean or deny it. So far but not further: in style and in temperament there are the deepest differences between the Frenchwoman and the Englishman. Lawrence's style, at least the mature style of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love* (in its deliberate self-assertiveness it perhaps ought to be called "style" in contrast to the urbane and quiet *idiom* of Colette), radically proposes an envelopment of zones of consciousness that Colette does not seem aware of and would probably not have believed in; and Colette's fatalistic temperament—the moon's dark side to the fitful phases of Lawrence's exacerbated optimism—will not permit her to accept the possibility of any sort of salvation, in heaven or on earth, spiritual or carnal, beyond the most transient and the most unsustainably accidental.

On this dark side Colette notably resembles Chaucer, the most humane and most Catholic of English poets. Chaucer may, and sometimes explicitly does, reserve Christian salvation for those most sensible of the inadequacies of "this world, that passeth soone as floures faire"; but the greatest of his poems positively represent, in an idiom that anticipates all the grace and definition of classical French, the grace and grandeur and ultimate poignant futility of sexuality, whether in Troilus

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or the Wife of Bath, with such force and steadiness as to foreclose appeal beyond the transience of all created things, including man. Chaucer is, of course, one of the supreme figures: not to enlarge on the preëminence of his comic powers, his range and his sympathies are incalculably wider (since they are wider than the range and sympathies of all but two or three other of the world's writers); but the comparison does Colette more honor, and is more just, than the comparison with Strether.

Colette has no considerable comic gift to color her measured and equable fatalism; yet the effect of her major novels is not somber or deprived. Her disbelief is only in permanence; it does not extend to unenduring things themselves, or to the delight their exuberant diversity provokes in a mind which has been taught to observe. Her novels are, before anything else, tributes to the testimony of the senses. She inspires us with the confidence of strong outlines, of inexhaustibly substantial objects, of feelings released and defined in primally recurrent situations. Women novelists preceding her, and since, write romances, in which women conform, more or less, to social and sexual rôles; Colette too writes about women mainly, but women who have lost or shaken off their rôles, and what she sees in her women—it may not be the whole truth, but it is what she sees—is a slow and inquisitive tidal carnality which abolishes romance and which at the same time encourages hasty readers to perpetuate her long-lived and still not quite moribund reputation as a sensational and suspect novelist. Colette reports a complaint from one of her husbands: "But can't you write a book that isn't about love, adultery, semi-incestuous affairs, separations? Isn't there anything else in life?" The man was right: Colette has limitations; there *are* other things in life, which her angle of vision, acute (sharp and narrow) as it is, just doesn't take in. It is true that Colette did not write *The Red and the Black,* or *The Idiot,* or even *The Kreutzer Sonata*—neither did Jane Austen or Mme. de La Fayette or George Eliot—but she wrote *Chéri* and *The Last of Chéri*; and the first rule of criticism is to examine not what isn't there (Strether, laborious ambiguity, war and politics, familiar fictional images of women, manifestoes on the virtues of celibacy) but what is. *Regarde.*

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

LET US TURN OUR ATTENTION NOW to what Broadway is most and least famous for: musical comedies and plays of ideas. When I say most famous, I refer, of course, to musicals, which, according to a recent article by Horst Kögler in *Der Monat,* a leading German periodical, demonstrate how much the German theatre still has to learn from us. For the benefit of the German theatre, then, we'll start with musicals.

Since at this writing I am just recovering from a joyous holiday named after him, I shall begin with Noël Coward, whose *Sail Away* is so burstingly full of the spirit of the Thirties, and so utterly devoid of everything else. It is sad to see the grand master of witty dialogue lapse into a theatrical climacteric; to find the supreme magician of the English non-art song in his musical menopause. *Sail Away* uses some songs from previous Coward flops such as *Pacific 1860,* but even the new ones are as chilling as warmed-up left-overs. In this musical cruise, there are the customary jokes about tourists, Americans, Englishmen, natives, ship's personnel and their relations to the passengers—"They get V.I.P. treatment. You know: Captain's table and extra fruit in the cabin." With all those homosexual gags, unattractive girls, and gorgeous chorus boys, the one thing the show could do without is extra fruit. The things it cannot do without include jokes that are not vulgar like "It's Josh Logan's *Fanny* on a wide screen," or superannuated like "Ever since I retired from the stage on popular demand. . . ." Nor can it spare better lyrics than these which rhyme "rallentando" with "you're no Marlon Brando," or catchier songs than "Don't Turn Away From Love" with its completely tuneproof insulation. Add to this—or, rather, subtract from it—Joe Layton's choreography which ranges from the amateurish to the insipid, and a cast either uncharming or untalented or both. Nor was I particularly delighted by Elaine Stritch in the male lead. Can any of this be the work of Noël Coward whose witty and poignant fancies once were legion? Noël, Noël, *redde mihi legiones!*

Kean boasts three librettists: Dumas *père,* who wrote the original play, Sartre, who adapted it, and Peter Stone, who made a musical out of it. It boasts also a remarkably handsome production designed by Ed Wittstein, and a star who boasts all over the place. Alfred Drake, whom we remember as perhaps our greatest musical-comedy talent, has become one enormous swagger; charm and poise still come with the fustian, but it is all not so much bravura as bravado. Drake plays an Edmund Kean tormented by his lack of status: he is the foremost

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man of his day on the boards and between the sheets, but subordinate to the least twerp of a gentleman in the drawing room. Tortured by this enforced duality, he exclaims something to the effect of "O Shakespeare, what a great playwright you'd have been, if you had written me a part called Kean!" This seems rather inappropriate in a production into which the great playwright Alfred Drake (apparently the fourth librettist) has written a positively monolithic part all but called Alfred Drake. Drake, his voice prematurely gray and his ambitions belatedly Gielgudian, usurps every nook and cranny of the show, and even commits the strategic error of playing a scene from *Othello* in his grandest Stratford, Connecticut manner and still wishing us to take him for Edmund Kean. I have no more disbelief than the next person, but the suspension was killing me.

Out of the two leading ladies one truly splendid one could be fashioned if Joan Weldon's rousing good looks could be wedded to Lee Venora's ravishing voice. The music has its moments: in a delightfully comic trio, "Civilized People," in which Drake's timing and wit are at their zenith, in a roisterous but not wholly integrated number, "The Fog and the Grog," and in a limpid, Dr. Arneish period piece, "Penny Plain, Twopence Colored." But, for the most part, composer-lyricists Robert Wright and George Forrest have written a brashly obvious score, obviously in need of the collaboration—as in their previous musicals—of Villa Lobos, Grieg, or Borodin. Jack Cole's staging and dances are agreeable, and some performers seem to have talent, however much they are forced to let it fust unused; still, it is a long way from Sartre's comedy about illusion and reality to this "serious" musical comedy with delusions of reality.

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying has the most engaging first fifteen minutes of any current musical. Through that exemplary number, "A Secretary Is Not a Toy," everything satisfies us. The plot promises to be genuinely cynical, Abe Burrows's direction and Robert Fosse's musical staging yield tongue-in-cheek tableaux and movements that interlock with ratchet-like precision and hatchet-like satire, all this framed by Robert Randolph's sly scenery that knows how to be tastefully tasteless. Robert Morse, looking like some kind of floppy Mickey Rooney doll, lists more thoroughly and in more directions than the Tower of Pisa, and tosses smiles over his shoulder like a putty faun. This Machiavellian teddy bear is pitted against Charles Wilson Reilly's sissified snake-in-the-grass, a performance that has more vocal, kinetic, and histrionic know-how than I have seen combined in some time. But after a while everything flags: the satire becomes persiflage, and uninventive at that, Hugh Lambert's choreography proves banal, the costumes miscarry. Our hero's tricks congeal into a Morse code less dashingly dotty by the minute, the other principals disappoint us, and Frank Loesser's score wasn't much to begin

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with. In less time than it takes to say "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying," it becomes evident that *show* business is no exception.

Although a good deal of scattered talent has gone into *The Gay Life,* based on Arthur Schnitzler's *Anatol,* the finished product confuses Schnitzler's Vienna with *Wiener Schnitzel.* The worst offender is the musical's book, which manages to be even more embarrassing in the three places in which it approaches Schnitzler than in all the others where it ignores him. But this brilliant, astringent, timeless play has been turned into something even less than *Schnitzel:* into ultra-American apple pie with about as much universal interest as the Pillsbury Baking Contest. Thus the "Christmas Shopping" episode, in which a respectable married woman thinks yearningly of the life of a *cocotte,* here becomes an incident in which the naïve and pure heroine, nurturing a clandestine crush on the hero, envies the attentions he showers on his mistress—and all the pointed social comment is lost. In the "Wedding Morning" scene, wherein Anatol is shown staggering toward church and his bride from a bed which he shared with another woman, our authors, besides other changes, assure us that the Other Woman very properly "passed out on the bedspread"—thus losing the satire on our sexual mores. What do they offer us instead? Dialogue like: "You're a woman!—How would *you* know? You never really looked at me.—I'm looking at you now."

The tunes and lyrics of Dietz and Schwartz wouldn't be half bad if they didn't, like the dialogue, sport such macaronic gems as "Oh, *Mein Liebchen*" and "Now I'm Ready for a *Frau.*" But Herbert Ross's dances are exquisite as ballet and germane to the plot (which is more than one can say for the plot)—if only one of them did not resemble so closely a sequence from Kurt Hoffmann's movie version of *Felix Krull.* In the cast, besides an unusually talented and attractive singing and dancing chorus, are three extremely able performers: Walter Chiari, who breezes with equal grace through romance, comedy, and rubber-legged pantomine; Loring Smith, whose irascibility is a joy forever; and Ballet Theatre's Jenny Workman, who does more with a little miming and dancing than some of the principals with all their lines and songs. There are also three bewitching actresses: Jeanne Bal, Elizabeth Allen, and a young Frenchwoman, Yvonne Constant, whose improvised twentieth-century *argot* is totally inappropriate and perfectly irresistible. But atrocities are being committed in Old Vienna—and they all take place in the American Sector.

Most curious, to me, is the case of *Subways Are for Sleeping.* It was attacked by all the more self-righteous reviewers with a bravery they seldom exhibit in the face of an expensive musical, particularly when it flies the hallowed—and vastly overrated—flag of Comden and Green. Yet *Subways* has some entirely likable Jule Styne songs, appealing dances by Michael Kidd (if they resurrect the once beloved "street-

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corner ballets" like *Fair at Sorochinsk,* this merely adds a nice nostalgic patina), pleasing sets by Will Steven Armstrong, a good-looking and efficient chorus line, and two nonpareils in Orson Bean and Phyllis Newman. The principals may be less than perfect: Sydney Chaplin, though charming, is rather somnambulistic; and Carol Lawrence is a little too deliberate as she hitches her wagging chin to a star. Still, the only serious deficiency of *Subways* is its book.

Now when a musical can get clobbered for a bad book, things are in a bad way. It means that the ridiculous notion that musical comedy must be taken seriously, that it must be taken as a full-fledged art form which, for example, must make sense, has gained widespread credence. Of course, there have been musicals that have achieved just such stature, but they are as rare as a grand opera with a meaningful libretto, and are, apparently, always signed Brecht and Weill. For the rest, I prefer the off-handedness of *Subways* to the "music drama" of *South Pacific* or even the spiritual uplift of *The Sound of Music,* which does for the human soul roughly what Maidenform does for the female bust.

In *Ross,* Terence Rattigan examines what caused the author of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* to turn into a pillar of salt, and finds that the answer is sodomy. While I do not wish to dispute Mr. Rattigan in matters on which he is an authority, the fact remains that the Lawrence Mystery never struck me as much more interesting than, say, the exact nature of the young Henry James's relationship to his bicycle (believed to have been quite racy); in fact, I was not, even in my youth, as moved by Lawrence of Arabia as I was by Scott of the Antarctic—possibly because Scott never messed around with Homer. Anyway, Mr. Rattigan has not kindled any belated enthusiasm in me. The greatness of his Lawrence is horizontal rather than vertical—by which I mean that it is all in the victorious sweep across deserts and enemy lines, in the conquest of a will over far-flung obstacles, and as such far more suitable material for the movie camera than for the dramatist's and theatregoer's eyes, which can thoroughly look a man up and down but cannot follow him very far across.

Mr. Rattigan is like a singer who has an admirable middle range, and can cope with the lower, darker register reasonably well; but when the *tessitura* gets sublimely high, can only fake it in with a falsetto. When the going in *Ross* approximates drawing-room comedy, as in Allenby's and Lawrence's battle of wits, the writing purrs along urbanely over half-sheathed claws and we have a good show. When things become serious and we hear philosophical utterances like "There's nothing clean or dirty but thinking makes it so," we can, at best, toy nervously with the old school tie and mutter, "Good show!"

It is a far cry from *Ross* to *A Man for All Seasons,* a play that comes off as biography, as drama of ideas, and, quite simply, as entertain-

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ment. It may be that Robert Bolt's Sir Thomas More is not exactly a man for *all* seasons: not for the heat of July, for instance, or for the gambols of May. But what better company for the bittersweet glow of Indian summer, or during winter's restless rattling under the eaves?

"What has nature ever fashioned softer, or sweeter, or pleasanter than the disposition of Thomas More?" asked his friend Erasmus. "Where is the man of that gentleness, lawliness, and affability?" wondered Robert Whittinton, and Robert Bolt has taken these rhetorical questions perhaps a shade too literally. It should surprise no one who sees *A Man for All Seasons* to learn that Mr. Bolt was a schoolteacher: there is a good deal of the Senior Common Room about the play. I do not mean this unkindly: it is intelligent and literate and has such a blend of high-toned idealism and artful dodging as, in our day, only the denizens of faculty rooms can—and must—evolve. There is wit, grace, courage, common sense, and dignity in Bolt's Thomas More, but he does ultimately emerge as a schoolmasterly hero, a man who will advise an impoverished young man of dubious character to become a schoolteacher, a man who watches with scholarly condescension as Henry VIII, showing off in Latin, turns "it is most well" into *"optimus est,"* and, in general, gilds his baser emotions with a gentle, donnish irony. Accordingly, he shows much less affection for his uneducated wife than for his daughter whom Master John Colet has taught Greek, and is not seen, like the real-life More, publishing polemical tracts that hounded poor Tyndale to his death. But this is not to say that Bolt's More is unlovable or even unbelievable; and there is something eminently winning in the way he reluctantly backs into greatness: "We have to stand fast a little, even at the risk of being heroes," or in the manner he sums up the perfect courtier: "The basic syrup with just a soupçon of impudence."

As a play of ideas, *A Man for All Seasons* has to operate against considerable odds. There is the fact that the protagonist is never challenged by an antagonist of commensurate intellectual stature, and there is the difficulty that More's unbending Catholicism which causes his martyrdom may not seem so ineluctably compelling today. No doubt Mr. Bolt wishes us to substitute whatever equivalents are dearest to us, like sitting down in Trafalgar Square or refusing to sign loyalty oaths. But all principles are surely not equally good: lifting the siege of Orléans and freeing one's country from foreign marauders seems a worthier cause for dying than absolute obedience to the Church of Rome. Granted everyone must work out his canonization as best he can, all ways do not seem equally endearing or even stageworthy. All this notwithstanding, Bolt has constructed a drama which is almost always intellectually challenging, and if it is perhaps more of a chronicle play than a tragedy, it manages to make the distinction an academic one: the passing parade and panoply of the history play are abridged and foreshortened, issues and individuals merge in their lowest common denominator—the approach is panoptic rather than panoramic.

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But the final excitement of the play lies in its sound dramaturgy: action and idea are fused in just proportions, as are gravity and wit. The metaphysical and the palpable are juxtaposed and staunchly sustain each other; it is what Corot recommended to a disciple: "Next to uncertainty always put a certitude." Thus More can come out after some fancy verbal feints with the Spanish ambassador with such a plain passado as "You live in Cheapside, Señor. To make contact with a brother in Christ you have only to open your windows and empty your chamber pot." And during More's last interview with his family, following some impassioned pleas and counterpleas, Bolt has his hero say to Mistress More, "That's a nice dress you're wearing," the sort of thing he perfunctorily remarked in better days. In astonishment almost verging on reproach, his wife replies, "It's just my cooking dress!" To which More, with aching tenderness: "It's very nice, anyway." These four words in their particular context are of that simplicity of which greatness is made.

One might possibly object to the figure of The Common Man who, as commentator or participant, fulfills the roles of a lowbrow chorus whose sense is as common as dirt, of a voice from the present providing anachronistic footnotes on what happened to whom afterwards, and of a touchstone, or touchclod, against whom More's greatness and our littleness can be measured. But Bolt has integrated this part so adroitly, and George Rose delivers the apologetics of opportunism with such alternately sniveling and sniggering rascality, that the gurgling of these gutter solos seems plucked on our own guts.

The great performance of the evening, however, is Paul Scofield's Thomas More. Here an actor embraces his part with a genuine *amor intellectualis*. It is as if a vast, benevolent mind suffused every gesture and every inflection—every wrinkle of a face resigned to its ability to face anything, whether or not it can be countenanced. The voice comes at us with a subdued intensity, as of someone patiently trying to carve meaning out of the obdurate mass of encircling verbiage. The actor's movements have the economy and deliberateness of a man conceiving of locomotion less as displacement than as discourse, and his facial expressions have the unassuming elegance of one whose features serve chiefly to keep his brain clothed.

A word must be said, too, for Noel Willman's staging and Motley's sets and costumes. Both Willman and Motley have a firm hold on essentials, a contempt for the blandishments of irrelevance, and a blessed gift for blending purposiveness with taste. In this way the intelligence of the audible is matched by the comeliness and seemliness of the visible. All of our objections to *A Man for All Seasons* could be written on the back of the ticket stub, and, with it, discarded; we leave with the awareness of having been not just *at* the theatre, but *in* it: extended to its limitless limits.

Just why *The Apple* is called *The Apple* I can no more tell you than why it is called (not by me!) a play. Perhaps it is not even called *The*

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Apple on all nights, but is freely improvised as perversely as possible by the seven actors who use their own names, so as to shock and rattle us into buying the greatest amount of lemonade and coffee from the same actors during one intermission, and to bid as high as can be, during another, for an action painting one of the actors has squirted and sloshed before our very eyes. It may be that the intermissions are the real thing, and that the three abominable acts of *The Pear* are merely meant to make us appreciate the entr'actes more fully.

The Banana concerns a Chinese girl, a Negro, a pederast, a whore, a con-man, a spastic, and a typical member of the audience who is the repository of every form of vileness. They act out a number of anarchist, sado-masochist, and obscurantist charades, some of which contain a little effective theatricality, a couple of which abut on meaning, and one of which is imaginative and affecting. But it would be idle to detail the various scenes of *The Pineapple,* beyond saying that they all amount to a would-be stentorian "Screw you!" hurled in the face of things and people as they are. In its more dialectic moments, *The Papaya* lets out with statements like "Our configuration is like the structure of a nucleus . . . celestial and out of touch with one another"; in its spicier phases, *The Passion Fruit* shows us the spastic being taunted during a fit with the offer of a woman, the homosexual trying to stick his hand in the Chinese girl's crotch (horizontally, of course!), and a couple stuck together during copulation brought out on stage in a wheelbarrow. *The Casaba* is, however, pertinently directed by Judith Malina, and capably performed by all but Marion Jim and Julian Beck, whose rendition of a homosexual is, quite unintentionally, the most potent argument for heterosexuality yet adduced in a theatre, nay, a society rather in need of one.

It goes without saying that, for all its paroxysms and bellowing, *The Boysenberry* does, or, rather, undoes nothing—except perhaps the reputation its author, Jack Gelber, achieved with his previous play, *The Connection.*

The Night of the Iguana is not vintage Williams, but at least it comes from the same cellar that gave us *Menagerie* and *Streetcar* rather than from the Calcuttan black hole that exuded some of his more recent works. It is old wine in old bottles, which is as should be, but some scenes taste a little of cork, and the wine leaks messily out of the cracked container. There is, first of all, the ramshackle Mexican boardinghouse with its rickety but randy proprietress, whose star boarder (her evening *and* morning star) is an unfrocked minister turned tourist guide, with a penchant for leading tours down back roads and the youngest female tourists up the garden path ("Statutory rape," he explains, "that's when a man is seduced by a girl under twenty"), and a further affinity toward fits during which he has to be tied to his hammock in "a comfortable, a luxurious crucifixion." Into this ghostly hostelry comes, besides a number of noisily irrelevant minor characters,

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a blind bard in his late nineties, led by his granddaughter, a New England spinster who ekes out her "Nonno's" meager earnings from reciting poesies of a curiously un-Edwardian flavor with her own equally meager gains from peddling her watercolors. The watercolors we are happily spared—unlike the poems, which contain lines like "The earth's obscene, corrupting love." The body of the play is a duologue between the God-hating "man of God on 'vacation' " and the combination Antigone and Emily Dickinson, to the accompaniment of the jeering Aristophanic chorus of the proprietress who wants her boarder back, and the noble Sophoclean chorus of the grandfather who wants the golden age of poetry back.

The central exchange begins as a mixture of sympathy and defiance which has the spinster and the ex-minister batting at each other little balls of amused tolerance or chilling irony, and sometimes, for good measure, hurling the bat itself. But, gradually, their understanding grows to the point where they pay each other the supreme tribute two Williamsian characters can pay: they tell each other their life stories. The archetypal example of this occurs in Williams's most powerful poem, "Life Story," which, I believe, has not yet been recognized as the source of the similarly futile exchange in the first act of *Sweet Bird of Youth* between the hero and the aging diva. (And what of the turning of a homosexual poem into an ostensibly heterosexual situation in a play?) But unlike many Williamsian characters, the confessing pair in *Iguana* really hear each other and learn something thereby: even if they cannot join their far too divergent selves, they can at least achieve respect for another's antipodal but equivalent misery, and draw from the realization a wistful fortitude.

Other plays of Williams's start from such a colloquy: *Camino Real,* for instance, which, like *Iguana,* grew from one such scene into a full-length play. But whereas this sound kernel of *Camino Real* was smothered by a mighty hard husk to crack, in *Iguana* it manages to impart a lovely, controlledly bittersweet savor to a play which some importunate impurities at times make less palatable, but never wholly distasteful. If only Frank Corsaro's direction were less crude and superficial, and if Patrick O'Neal's showy, mumbling and undisciplined performance were up to Margaret Leighton's with its beautifully muted radiance—perhaps a trifle too empyreal at times, but how noble!—but it isn't. Nor is Mr. Williams all he might be and was. But he's getting there.

"An honest God is man's noblest work of art," said Oscar Wilde, standing Pope on his head; now along comes Paddy Chayefsky's *Gideon,* and God is, well, not exactly stood on his head, just made to fall on his backside. Not a very noble work of art, this God of Chayefsky's who begins as a capricious despot, and develops a kind of locker-room palsy-walsiness with Gideon. And he ends as a bearded (in both senses) autocrat forced to accept the fact that he is no longer top dog and recite

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some bottom-drawer doggerel about how man may yet become a wisely emancipated being: "You know, he might, he might some day! / With this conceit we end the play." And a pretty awful conceit it is, too, but nothing compared to the one needed to begin such a play.

If God changes from tryannical to feeble, Gideon—man—evolves from servile and stolid to vain and self-willed. In his effort to humanize both God and Gideon, Mr. Chayefsky, to whom humanity is a kind of Marty-ness, has endowed both of them (since he is aiming for higher literary effects) with arty-Marty qualities. And at no point can we truly sympathize with either God or Gideon, largely because the play lacks a point of view. For two thirds of the way the idea seems to be "Don't make a cult out of man—not even in fancy!" (I'm not sure how it could possibly be made in anything else), only to switch to the opposite position that Gideon must act "so that man may be a significant creature." To which this God remarks, "This is beyond even God's understanding!"

The prevailing muddledness is manifest in the language. A statement will begin in a grand Biblical tone, "Whoever is fearful and trembling, let them go home!" (note that the grandness does not extend to the grammar), and continue in the flattest present-day fashion, "You may return to your farms." Chayefsky himself undercuts both the Biblical and the modern mode. First it is: "Whosoever shall not follow after Gideon, and so forth, and so forth. . . . Well, it's hard to take that sort of thing seriously." And then: "Some wild farrago of things about the temporal inadequacies of man." So he runs both idioms through his Mix-master and out come things like "I am but a personation of God" followed by things like "Oh dear, I see this is heavy going for you." I cannot help feeling that a Waring blender does even less to justify God's ways to man than Milton can, to say nothing of beer.

Confusion is evident on other levels too. Consider the stage image in which Gideon is drifting away from God. His ability to see God is rapidly forsaking him, however hard he and God strive to reëstablish ocular communion. The spectacle of Gideon, at the very moment of his emancipation, straining to see God and failing to do so is perhaps contradictory but believable; but the sight of God huffing and puffing to make himself visible, and, despite his omnipotence, failing, is ludicrous and wrong. As is the whole caricature of God. If Blake, according to Humbert Wolfe, depicted God as an old English sheepdog, Chayefsky sees him as a Michelangelo head mounted on top of a Chagall costume, and behaving like a Pekingese in a tantrum. The loss of dignity is made conclusive by Fredric March's poor diction and skittish performance.

I shall not go into all the other vulgarities—the half-naked belly-dancer, the idiot guard who always mistakes Gideon for the enemy and keeps taking prattfalls, the stock characters like the hellfire-and-brimstone prophet and the cynical agnostic, the gratuitous gags based on

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anachronism, and all the rest which Tyrone Guthrie's resourceful but burlesque direction merely emphasizes. My main wonder is that someone with Chayefsky's poor command of language should have risked such an enterprise. We hear, for example, of "slipping backstream," where "backstream," I suppose, is a solecism for upstream, but one can slip only downstream. Again, a puzzling problem is said to "bear attenuation," as if attenuation were tantamount to elucidation. Yet, to my amazement, here are words like "charismatic," "corybantic," and "sessile" being casually kicked around the stage like so many old shoes —I mean, buskins.

But perhaps, in the spirit of *Gideon,* this may be explained by a parable. I once let a well-known four-letter word slip out in the presence of a not well-known Bennington girl. To cover up my *gaffe,* I said, "Oh, I'm sure you don't know the meaning of that word." Proudly she replied, "I certainly do! It's a famous German philosopher of the Idealist school." I did not know which to marvel at more: such learning, or such ignorance?

NORMAN N. HOLLAND

Dangerous Disconnections

GRANDEUR, SO THEY SAY, is the reason one of the first and finest ripples of *la nouvelle vague* did not splash over here until late 1961. Fifth Republic officialdom feared lest *Les Liaisons Dangereuses,*[1] made in 1959, give outsiders the impression that sex is a favorite indoor sport in France, that there is adultery, divorce, even crimes of passion in the highly moral atmosphere of de Gaullist Gaul, worst of all, that positions at the Quai d'Orsay are available through influence. But surely by now the guardians of French culture must have gotten over their shock at the appearance in 1782 of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses,* the novel by Choderlos de Laclos; the film is simply a quite brilliant redaction of this finest flowering of the *libertin* tradition.

The novel, said Baudelaire, consists largely of *la fouterie et la gloire de la fouterie,* and, happily, the film is much the same. It begins chicly with a cocktail party at the home of Valmont and Juliette, he a

[1] Directed by Roger Vadim. Screenplay by Vadim, Roger Vailland, and Claude Brule. Photography by Marcel Grignon. Music by Thelonious Monk and Jack Murray. The outstanding, even dominating performances are by Jeanne Moreau as Juliette and the late Gérard Philipe as a tender, almost pixyish Valmont. Highly decorative are Annette Vadim as Marianne and Jeanne Valerie as Cécile.

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well-known bedroom athlete and trophy collector, she known to all the world as his faithful wife, though in fact as liberated as he, just a little more discreet. Valmont and Juliette have an "understanding": each partner in the marriage is to have absolute freedom but must show absolute candor to the other. At the moment, Juliette is being thrown over by her American lover, Jerry Court, who wants to marry a virginal young schoolgirl, Cécile. Juliette asks Valmont to seduce Cécile on her behalf and thus pay Court back, but unknown to either of them, Cécile really loves a young mathematics student, Danceny. Valmont pursues Cécile to a ski resort and by playing on her fear that her family will find out about her "true-false" fiancé, Danceny, manages to accomplish Juliette's mission in a cozy little seduction scene that should win this film quite a following among the readers of *Dude* and *Gent*.

At the same time, however, Valmont meets and, to his chagrin, falls in love with a highly virtuous young wife and mother, Marianne. Juliette appears at the resort and ridicules him—he promises to seduce and desert Marianne. He follows her to Paris and there succeeds handily in the first half of the mission (in another scene for the members of the Playboy Club), goes off for a weekend to the seashore with her, and, when Juliette again plays on his *amour propre,* cruelly drops her.

Meanwhile, though, the plot has thickened. Cécile is pregnant, and Juliette, pretending to get Danceny to marry her, has begun an affair with the young man. After a good deal of hanky-panky, Danceny slugs Valmont who dies when he falls on a convenient andiron, Cécile turns out a true daughter of the game, Marianne goes mad, Juliette tries to burn the incriminating letters and interestingly disfigures her face.

It is really all very moral; in fact, there is a certain fatal-glass-of-beer quality to the whole thing. Had Cécile not chosen to reveal her illicit love for Danceny, had Marianne not kissed Valmont . . . alas, once they have taken these first little steps into corruption, there is no turning back. In fact, the American distributors have provided a little moral foreword to the film, spoken by its creator, Roger Vadim (best known for his discovery of the highly cinematic qualities of B.B.). Vadim, himself doubled in a mirror, explains with a roguish leer that he wishes his camera to show us a picture—*sans sentiment*—of a certain kind of woman, one who wants the same freedom as a man but, because we have a double standard, is forced to take the way of duplicity, hypocrisy, deceit, and in the last words of the film, the *raisonneuse* explains as she exults over Juliette's scarred face that now, *now,* her face is the image of her soul.

Appearance-and-nature, the uses of the social mask to make viable our raw Hobbesian selves—this is at least one of Vadim's themes, neatly imaged in the shot of chessmen under the screen credits. At first, they seem stately, formal in their positioned blacks and whites. As the camera closes in, we see they are crude, harsh, almost African figures in the social minuet. The black and white of the chessboard sets up the

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film's concern with good-and-evil: Marianne is a pure good; Juliette a pure evil. Throughout the film blonde Marianne is surrounded with white, while black, we are told, becomes Juliette. In a sense, the two women represent two ways of erasing the double standard, one all goodness and candor, the other all evil and duplicity. Juliette is cold and subtle as a snake; we never see her love. Marianne's cold is the cold of the snow at the ski resort—over and over again we see her face ringed with crystals of ice and snow like one of the winter princesses of legend. It is a little hard to think of Valmont as the favored son who will rescue the snow-maiden from the everlasting cold of her chastity, but in a lovely scene of their weekend by the sea, we find him breathing tenderly on her chilled feet to warm them. Valmont and Juliette both suffer their tragic ends wrapped in the flames, presumably, of passion, while we last see Marianne in a white, white room, returned in her madness to purity and innocence.

These sharp opposites—hot-and-cold, black-and-white, appearance-and-nature, outside-and-inside, man-and-woman, snow-and-fire—suggest that Vadim's concern is not with any one of these schisms but the very state of schism itself. The film, in other words, images the tension between two states of mind: dispassionate play and passionate commitment. As Juliette says, "No liaison is dangerous for me, because my heart is protected by my head." Clearly enough, the plot pins Valmont on this dilemma: he is torn between his wish to keep up his game with Juliette and his very real and very involuntary love for Marianne. Or Cécile—split between the family-approved American fiancé and her mathematical friend. And by the end of the film, Juliette is saying to the increasingly truculent Valmont: "The Valmont I married was *aimable,* but now Mme. Tourvel [Marianne] has given me a husband." Vadim himself is split in the opening blurb into real Vadim and mirrored Vadim.

The image the film uses for one state of mind, dispassionate play, is naturally enough—play. The shot under the screen credits is of chessmen, and the opening shot of the film proper turns those chessmen into people at a party seen from the same high camera angle as the chessmen. Throughout the film, Valmont and Juliette treat love as a game of war—who conquers whom? who has surrendered? how to attack? who has fallen? At the ski resort, Valmont, the consummate lover, contrasts with a barbarian in terms of skiing; the barbarian falls (*tombe*), while Valmont is all swooping grace—until he, too, falls as he first sees Marianne. Style, be it in skiing, amatory techniques, or letters is all-important. Juliette, when she hands Danceny the horrifying letter in which Valmont has told her of his affair with Cécile, can remark drily, "The style is good, don't you think?" Danceny's mathematics or the Bach he plays in his garret are themselves games (if we can take the concept of play in its large, Huizingan sense), as is the diplomacy which runs through the film: loving Jerry Court is "exploring the New

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World"; Valmont's amatory tutorials are "helping the under-developed nations"; he seeks a post at the U.N., surely the ultimate game.

But the games break down. The tidy rhythms of Thelonious Monk give way to a *Dolce Vita*-style jazz orgy at the end. Some kind of minimum of mathematics comes when Valmont telephones Marianne while complacently lying on the nude Cécile who in turn is busy doing her homework in, naturally enough, descriptive geometry. The social game gets exceedingly untidy when Juliette advises Cécile, who is unhappy at the prospect of a long engagement to Danceny. "Think of your reputation—become Valmont's mistress!" Both Valmont and Juliette edge toward the parental, she like a mother to Cécile and Danceny, he like a father. He speaks of Marianne's child as the only child he could look at with a father's eyes. At the same time, in some form of ultimate paradox, Juliette and Valmont become passionate about their dispassion. It is as though the film is saying neither attitude is stable in the restless, circling world of Vadim's peripatetic camera.

Games and play put forth the attitude of dispassionate play that finds its focus in the face of Juliette (Jeanne Moreau), sensual, aging, faintly vulgar, as against the sense of passionate commitment embodied by her polar, or at least snow-covered, opposite, Marianne. Pale, blonde, delicate, young, she seems an insufficient counterweight, and it is Vadim's brilliant camera work that redresses the balance. At the opening of the film, the camera simply glides and hovers in the long, slow movements we have come to expect from *la nouvelle vague,* swooping from face to face, but retaining always the tone of the alert, but dispassionate observer, indeed, as in the novel Valmont instructs a servant, "Better that she should record ten useless facts, than omit one interesting one."

At the first appearance of Marianne, however, the camera's role changes from that of mere observer to passionate commentator. We see her face through the enchanted glass of Valmont's sudden exuberant laugh of love. As the film goes on, the camera continues in this other role, commenting, evaluating. When Valmont lies to Juliette and denies that he loves Marianne, the camera swirls out behind the window of their room to look at them as they now see each other—through a glass of deception. When Marianne flees the ski resort, again, the camera looks at her through a window, the distance she seeks to set between herself and her secret wish. Again, when in the park Juliette speaks to Danceny with seemingly maternal sincerity, the camera finds out the hidden barrier of falsity; seeking to zoom in on their encounter, it virtually trips over a baby-carriage and a tree.

Vadim's finest—though almost obvious—effects are for Marianne. When she first lets Valmont kiss her, it is in the raucous dark of a New Year's Eve party. By contrast light floods their second kiss, the crucial kiss of her surrender. The camera halts on their silent, lone embrace, and the lens slowly opens, running the image into higher and higher

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key, until the shot becomes simply a blinding white glare. The device is extreme, but it does give visually, stilly, the sheer flare of passion. Vadim's camera turns lyric after the seduction with a long, caressing shot of Marianne's naked body, Valmont lying at her breast like a child. But Vadim's finest effect is Marianne's brief mad scene, as fine in its own cinematic way as Ophelia's or Margarete's, indeed, reminiscent of them in Marianne's crazed respeaking, *"des roses, des roses, des roses . . ."* As throughout with Marianne, it is a high-key shot, a white room with white light at the window, white bedspread, white dressing-gown. Radically wide-angled, the edges of the shot are thrown out of focus, while in focus, central, haunting, Marianne's pellucid eyes dominate the image.[2]

Over and over again, in the purest *nouvelle vague* manner, Vadim uses the sound track to contrast with the image and to suggest the contrast between the reality of presence and the unreality of the disembodied voice—a cinematic equivalent to the novel's epistolary form. For example, Cécile turns up at Danceny's garret; into his tape recorder, she speaks a promise to wait as long as he likes, but in actuality she simply slithers onto his bed. Later, Danceny records a message to her at the ski-resort, and it is by procuring a tape-recorder to play it that Valmont procures Cécile; the voice of the absent Danceny provides an ironic echo to the all-too-urgent presence of Valmont. Vadim clues us in on the technique in (if I remember correctly) the fourth sequence of the film. Suddenly, the film cuts to a prizefight scene, sweaty, smoky, real. We are there, as they say, until the camera pulls back and we see it is only Jerry Court watching the fights on TV. He switches the set off and telephones Juliette, who in turn talks to him while Valmont amiably paws her. In the same way, Valmont (who seems to have a penchant for this kind of game) telephones while lying on the nude Cécile. The acme of this ectoplasmic sense of modern communication comes when Juliette sends Valmont's cruel telegram of dismissal to Marianne: the voice of the operator, metallic as a lawnmower, repeats the brittle, cutting words, while the camera hovers momentarily on a pale, jade figure of Kwan Yin, an image perhaps of the absent mother, Marianne, perhaps an ironic note of "mercy." In the same style, Valmont, as he is seducing Marianne, drily recounts his passion in a letter to Juliette. We are seeing the seduction, but seeing it in flashback at the same time, a striking contrast of his dispassionate play, her passionate commitment.

By his very technique of distancing and disconnection, Vadim's camera acts out the curious strategy of externalization the characters go through. In a quite splendid way, Vadim has arrived at a *cinématographie libertine,* and yet the very uniqueness of his style sets the

[2] The effect, of course, is not a new one; of the dozens of possible sources, the most likely (because Vadim is one of the *Cahiers* directors) seems to me to be Hitchcock's soft-focus effects in *Vertigo,* though Vadim here is not using soft-focus in the strict sense, but rather a lens of too-small diameter.

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limits of his film's appeal, limits like those that beset Restoration comedy or the libertine novels of the eighteenth century: they offer us a neo-classic preoccupation with the social outside which goes so far as to find in that social exterior a mandate for the sex and aggression most of us can enjoy in a more normal, if less flamboyant, way. The film preoccupies itself with good-and-evil, but substitutes for an inner sense of guilt an outer sense of shame. The characters push their consciences out of themselves. They get rid of—try to get rid of—self by putting it outside of self and there controlling it in a kind of game.

It is this effort to externalize which implies the curious sense of danger that haunts the criticism of this novel (as P. W. K. Stone has pointed out) even unto the Fifth Republic. And, of course, one finds the same thing in English with Restoration comedy which builds on a similar psychological strategy. The whole issue of self-control gets shoved outside where we are forced to see it, forced to play it as a game, and ultimately, forced to fear when we feel it getting out of hand, when we feel the female far more deadly, far more cruel and brilliant than the male. But what horrible inside do Vadim and Vailland and Laclos and Wycherley want us to fear? And can the self be pushed outside and so controlled, or will some inner residue burst raw and flaming through to shrivel Juliette's face? Vadim has indeed indulged in a dangerous disconnection, not so much in a moral sense as in an artistic, for in these latter days of neo-romanticism, how many in his audience will play his gorgeous but ghastly game? Schism upon schism, Vadim's film demands of us an inner disconnection few can or care to make, and skilled and graceful as the film is, it seems destined for a libertine's fate, a disconnection between itself and its fearful audience.

B. H. HAGGIN

Ballet and Music Chronicle

IN A LETTER TO THIS MAGAZINE not too long ago Joseph Kerman made a distinction between the newspaper reviewing of music that was concerned chiefly with performance—"performance being news and box-office while music usually isn't"—and true music criticism, about which he contended that "a music critic should concentrate on music, not on musical performance, just as a dramatic critic should center his attention on plays and playwrights, not actors." But the superiority of Stark Young's dramatic criticism to even the best of today lay in the way he applied his extraordinary perception to the total theatrical event that

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presented itself to him—not only to the initial work of the playwright, but to what was made of it by the operation of the director, the actors' use of vocal inflection, timing, gesture, make-up, the contribution of scenery, costumes, lighting. And in a recent article Mr. Young pointed out the inadequacy of the criticism of today that left the art of the actor undiscussed. Music too is not something we read on the printed page; it is something we experience as it is realized in sound in particular performances; and the art of the performer in the particular realization is something for the music critic to concern himself with.

Mr. Kerman himself shifted ground in his next sentence: performance, it appeared, *was* something the music critic wrote about; but he must relate the writing about it to writing about the music. "Excellence in performance is the realization of the work of art from the page to actual sound; but how can one judge this excellence without insight into the work of art itself? And so how can one write relevantly about performance without writing about music?" One cannot, of course; but writing about music, for Mr. Kerman, meant writing the detailed close analysis of a piece of music that he wrote; and relevant writing about a performance related the performance to such analysis of the piece of music. I was, he said, not to be taken seriously as a critic because I didn't write about music—by which he meant that I didn't write detailed close analyses of pieces of music; and my writing about performance was of no value because it wasn't related to such analyses. Mr. Kerman was inaccurate about me: I had, on numerous occasions, written in detail about the happenings in pieces of music. But in addition he was wrong in his idea of music criticism: it is not limited to detailed close analysis, but includes summary value judgments, like Bernard Shaw's description of one of the Brahms piano concertos—"a desperate hash of bits and scraps, with plenty of thickening in the pianoforte part"—which is a judgment based on Shaw's experience of the happenings in the work, is capable of being verified by the reader's experience of those happenings, and is therefore valid and illuminating music criticism even though it isn't a detailed account of the succession of the "bits and scraps" that add up to the "desperate hash" in the first movement of Brahms's B-flat Concerto. And criticism of performance is not always related to detailed close analysis of the piece, but may also be summary. It may, that is, say that the melodic passages in a Mozart concerto were played by Artur Rubinstein in the unsuitable mannered style in which he plays Chopin; or on the other hand describe "the subtle articulation and clear outlining of phrase, the delicacy and at the same time the cohesive tension, the limpidity and at the same time the strength" in Schnabel's playing of Mozart.

Francis Toye, then, was writing as a music critic about Bellini's music when he observed that in the arias "there is little dramatic characterization; the Bellinian phrase is lyricism *in excelsis*." And so am I when I add that Bellini's lyrical writing much of the time stays on the

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level of a routine exercise of his style that isn't very impressive to the ear of today, and only now and then rises to something as compelling of attention and admiration as *"Casta diva"* in *Norma* or *"Qui la voce"* in *I Puritani;* that in *La Sonnambula* in particular, which the American Opera Society presented in December, it isn't until after the long first act that one hears *"Tutto è sciolto"*, and not until almost the end that one gets *"Ah, non credea mirarti";* that in addition to these two affecing pieces (which Rieti used in his score for Balanchine's ballet *La Sonnambula*) there are occasional passages which are charming, and even unusual, like the animated orchestral introduction (which Rieti also used); but that on the other hand with the routine and uninteresting there is a considerable amount that strikes the ear of today as ridiculous—some of the fast concluding cabalettas, and the occasional writing in mellifluous thirds and sixths. And I am writing as a music critic about performance in what I report concerning Joan Sutherland's singing in *La Sonnambula.* A few years ago Maria Callas created new interest in the operas of Bellini and Donizetti with her singing of their difficult vocal parts—the delivery of melody that was made affecting by the strangely beautiful color of her lower notes, musically distinguished by her sense for continuity and shape of phrase, and eloquent by her powers of dramatic expressiveness; the execution of florid passages that was made spectacular by her vocal agility, accuracy and range and her bravura style. And now it is Sutherland who is exciting audiences with singing which in melody also exhibits an unfailing sense for continuity and shape of phrase, with in addition a steadiness and beauty in the higher notes that in Callas' singing are now wobbly and unpleasant; and which in florid passages exhibits an agility even more spectacular than Callas'. It is the bright, crystalline upper range of Sutherland's voice that is beautiful, not the lusterless lower range, in which her singing of melody makes its effect mostly with its long-breathed phrasing and style. And in this lower range she does a lot of singing in which the drab color, a low volume level, and pathetic inflection produce a succession of mournful moans—this sometimes when the words are about joy and happiness. In *La Sonnambula* one heard this moaning even in the recitative and melody of *"Come per me sereno"*; and in the Metropolitan performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor* one heard it even in the passage of the Mad Scene concerned with the demented Lucia's imagined recollection of the joyful occasion of her marriage to Edgar. As for the other singers, in *Lucia* the tenor was Richard Tucker, whose robust voice lacks the supple ease and warmth this music calls for; in *La Sonnambula* he was Renato Cioni, who most of the time used an unattractive full voice insensitively, and only now and then produced an agreeable *mezza voce* which he inflected sensitively; but in this opera there was beautiful and musically distinguished singing by the bass Ezio Flagello, and good singing by the soprano Eileen di Tullio and the contralto Betty Allen; and Nicola Rescigno held singers and orchestra together in a well-paced peformance.

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A major point of interest in the Metropolitan's revival of *Così fan Tutte* was the singing of the part of Fiordiligi by the soprano Teresa Stich-Randall. Her inflection of Mozartian phrase proved to be exquisite; but the bloom was entirely gone from the once lovely voice; and this affected not only her arias but the ensembles that are so numerous in *Così:* in the same way that poor tone from the first violin spoils the sound of a string quartet in which the tone from the other players is good, Stich-Randall's unattractive soprano damaged the marvelous vocal textures of the ensembles in *Così.* And as it happened they were damaged further by the somewhat metallic and edged sound of the tenor voice of George Shirley, the Ferrando, which was also disturbing in his arias. But the singing of Rosalind Elias, the Dorabella, Theodor Uppman, the Guglielmo, Frank Guarrera, the Don Alfonso, and Roberta Peters, the Despina, was good; and Josef Rosenstock paced the performance well. Once more the words I heard of the English translation of Ruth and Thomas P. Martin were a jarring distraction; and once more the use of English brought with it occasional excessive underscoring of comedy in the staging of the work by Carl Ebert, which I thought was less skillful than William Ball's for the New York City Opera. The elegant sets and the costumes were those Rolf Gerard designed for the 1952 production.

Mention of the effect of the first violin on the sound of a string quartet reminds me to speak of a concert of the Budapest Quartet at the Library of Congress. I retain recollections of performances by this group, and in particular one performance of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet, in the thirties—performances with a wonderful rightness in their pacing and shaping of the work, and a beauty, a sensitive inflection, and an integrated progression of the four strands of string tone that added up to the most extraordinary quartet-playing we had ever heard. Tempo and shape continued to be wonderfully right; but the first violin's tone became unpleasant and his intonation insecure; and at the concert I am writing about it was shocking to hear not only their further deterioration but the dry, whining tone of the viola and cello that had been richly somber. All this in the performance of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* which ended the concert; and in the Haydn quartet which began it a scraping and scratching like that of amateurs engaged in *Hausmusik.* Shocking too was the enthusiastic applause of a capacity audience which couldn't accurately hear and evaluate the group's playing but knew what was owed to its reputation. But most shocking was the behavior of the quartet, which unquestionably did hear the defects that brought its playing below the level required by that reputation, but which nevertheless went on offering this playing to audiences ignorant enough to applaud it.

It was because Van Cliburn is news and box-office that Carnegie Hall was filled for his performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5; but my reason for speaking of him here is the musical intelligence and taste, the unfailing sense for note-to-note continuity of flow and rightness of

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shape, that operated so impressively in the performance and make him one of the most distinguished musicians playing the piano in public today. The only thing this performance by a young man didn't have was the largeness of expressive communication that the matured art of Schnabel achieved in his performance of the work. The occasion was the first concert of a Beethoven series by the Symphony of the Air under Alfred Wallenstein, which gave me my first experience of his conducting. He turned out to be a musician who articulated the *Leonore* Overture No. 3 and the Fourth Symphony well, and a conductor who was able to get the orchestra to realize his conceptions accurately—even in the unusually fast tempos of the fast movements of the symphony—but didn't get from it the beauty of blended sound that Markevitch and Schippers got.

The first week of the New York City Ballet's season brought a new work of Balanchine, *Valses et Variations*—another of the display pieces in which his exploitation of virtuosity has achieved delightful art. It was a companion piece to *Pas de Dix,* using trashy music from an earlier act of the ballet *Raymonda* that Petipa created for the Maryinsky company, as against *Pas de Dix'* engaging music from the last act, and two soloists and a group of twelve girls as against the two soloists and four couples of *Pas de Dix,* but also using music and dancers in a Balanchine version of the kind of piece that might have used them in the Petipa period—a version, that is, employing Balanchine's ever new developments and elaborations of the movements he learned at the Maryinsky's school, and the syntax he has developed for their combinations in sequences and textures. Thus the piece could have served as a demonstration to the Leningrad Kirov company of what Balanchine had done with the Maryinsky style; and the movements devised for the particular capacities of the dancers demonstrated what *they* could do with it: in addition to the numbers which exhibited the virtuosity of Patricia Wilde and Jacques d'Amboise, there were solos for five of the girls—Suki Schorer, Victoria Simon, Gloria Govrin, Carol Sumner and Patricia Neary—which showed what accomplished dancers they were.

With this new work the company presented part of its repertory, with important changes of cast resulting from the absence of Diana Adams and Melissa Hayden. *Agon,* for example, had Allegra Kent in the part in which Adams achieves one of her most impressive performances, and which it was fascinating to see transformed by the exquisite fluidity Kent brought to it—the fluidity that also was enchanting in *Scotch Symphony* and *Serenade.* Gloria Govrin operated effectively in Adams' part in *Liebesliederwalzer,* but was painfully unequal to the taxing demands of the Siren in *The Prodigal Son.* And Patricia McBride, though technically impeccable, lacked power of presence and projection in the Hayden part in *Liebesliederwalzer,* the part of the Sleepwalker in *La Sonnambula,* in which she substituted for Kent, and

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in *Serenade*. In addition one performance of *Afternoon of a Faun* had Francisco Moncion again giving the piece the effectiveness he used to give it with his powerful presence. And a performance of *Apollo* had a realization of the title role by Conrad Ludlow—in movement whose beautiful plasticity became impressively grand in style—that was the finest since Eglevsky's in 1945, and that not only was free of the angularity and stuffiness of d'Amboise's performance but included a few details that d'Amboise omits.

The last weeks of the season brought the other of Balanchine's new works—an evening-length ballet version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* wonderfully imagined by Balanchine and brilliantly realized in his choreography, the scenery and lighting of David Hays, and the costumes of Karinska. The succession of scenes in the first act dealt with several of the dramatic themes of the play—the quarrel of Oberon and Titania, the confusion of the lovers, Titania's infatuation with Bottom—for which Balanchine used not only parts of Mendelssohn's music for the play but other Mendelssohn pieces which, it turned out, worked perfectly with the dance movements that were for the most part superbly contrived for each dramatic purpose. I say for the most part because in one instance what was exciting to look at seemed to me dramatically wrong: Edward Villella's Oberon exhibited suitable regal dignity at all times, except in the dance to the music of the Scherzo, which in effect had Oberon executing the brilliant leaps and turns of Villella instead of Villella performing the movements of a king (as Hayden, in her dances as Titania, performed the movements of a queen). But with this one exception what Balanchine contrived was not only fascinating to the eye but dramatically right. And this act concerned with the play's dramatic themes was followed by a second act devoted to the festivities on the occasion of the triple wedding of Hippolyta and Theseus and the two pairs of lovers at Theseus' court—principally a little ballet for two soloists and a small supporting group. The occasion seemed to me to call for something more imposing than the little ingenuities Balanchine devised for the inconsequential fast movements of the early Mendelssohn symphony he used for the ballet; and he approximated it in his invention for the more impressive middle movement. The ballet was followed by a stately dance by the three couples and the courtiers—after which there was a return to Titania and Oberon in the forest, with Puck, as in the play, having the last word. This last word was Arthur Mitchell's, whose Puck was outstanding among the numerous excellent performances—Hayden's as Titania, Villella's as Oberon, Violette Verdy's and Ludlow's (in place of d'Amboise) in the ballet, Jillana's, McBride's, Nicholas Magallanes's and Bill Carter's as the lovers, Roland Vazquez's as Bottom, Suki Schorer's as the principal Butterfly.

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Reviews

ROGER SALE

Novels, and Being a Novelist[1]

TWO KINDS OF WRITERS, the Thoroughly Established and the English, can be counted on to do as they have always done. The Thoroughly Established present an unhappy spectacle when they grow desperate and repetitious—the English, after all, cover up any deficiency with pleasant backgrounds and pleasant prose. Thus it is disheartening to chronicle the atrophying of Robert Penn Warren's imagination and only churlish to insist that Angus Wilson was never worth serious attention. But it is the mark of a good season that alternatives to the same old thing can be found. At the very least they allow for an air of briskness as one tries to clear away the underbrush and make one more attempt to see the larger landscape.

That is to say, Morley Callaghan once fenced with Hemingway and was praised by Edmund Wilson. Now he writes a "major novel" about Americans in Rome that fails to qualify as a major Gold Medal Original only because it is three times the proper length. The sad, mistrustful photographer, verging on middle age, meets the dipsomaniac with a heart of tarnished brass (she was raped by her benefactor at age twelve). He patiently tries to reclaim her lost talent and appetite for singing, they see the Pope die, he goes home and she stays because she belongs. To trace the antecedents of these characters and this plot would be rewarding for anyone interested in that major line of American fiction that runs from *Butterfield 8* to *Return to Peyton Place;* as it is, there are more novels about Rome to consider, like Alberto Moravia's *The Empty Canvas,* a bored and boring novel about, oddly enough, boredom. Here the sad, mistrustful painter, verging on middle age, meets the whore with no heart at all, and so instead of reading about wan smiles and jiggling breasts, we are treated to long accounts of passionate ennui and spicy post-Resistance philosophy about the nature of reality.

1 A PASSION IN ROME, by *Morley Callaghan*. Coward McCann. $4.95. THE EMPTY CANVAS, by *Alberto Moravia*. Farrar, Straus & Cudahy. $4.50. WILDERNESS, by *Robert Penn Warren*. Random House. $4.95. THE PAPERS OF ANDREW MELMOTH, by *Hugh Sykes Davies*. Morrow. $3.95. THE OLD MEN AT THE ZOO, by *Angus Wilson*. Viking. $4.50. THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE, by *Muriel Spark*. Lippincott. $3.95. GOD WAS BORN IN EXILE, by *Vintila Horia*. St. Martin's. $4.95. THE END OF IT, by *Mitchell Goodman*. Horizon. $4.50. CATCH-22, by *Joseph Heller*. Simon & Schuster. $5.95. THE HOURS TOGETHER, by *Clara Winston*. Lippincott. $4.95. THE END OF THE BATTLE, by *Evelyn Waugh*. Little, Brown. $4.50.

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Whatever claims one wants to make for his earlier work, however witty one finds his air of tired superiority, it is clear that Moravia can now be praised only for the tenacity with which he believes his daydreams could interest other people.

Warren too must be considered now as a case rather than as a practicing novelist, but I hope more than patriotism leads me to suggest that the case is worthier of attention. Warren is a man possessed by his search for the meaning of the voices he hears, and the proper praise of his best work is that he found a form, although one never free from self-regard, that expressed his need to search. As for *Wilderness,* which is about a wandering Jew in America during the year following Gettysburg, the reader knows as early as the second page that he is in for it:

> This was the moment when the dead realize the truth: *This it it, it will never be different.*
>
> To be dead, he thought, that was to know that nothing would ever be different.
>
> He thought: *I am alive.*

Here the voices come in on Warren at will and he lets himself mutter about their significance as he forgets everything that once forced him to be more than passively dazzled by his imagination. All the old phrases are offered with tired solemnity; for the reader of Warren, the result is hardly a book at all:

> . . . it's just that God is tired of taking the blame.
> He is going to let History take the blame for a while.
>
> He looked up and wondered how you could be alone and
> yet not alone. He wondered how you could be worth
> nothing, and yet worth something.

Whatever special reasons one offers for *Wilderness,* Warren's failure is painfully characteristic of a country of many good novels and almost no good novelists. Like Steinbeck, Warren seems to have been caught up in the wrong things too soon and placed in a position where he could not see that his genius could be best served by civilizing the metier of California toughs like Cain and Chandler. We need to know what went wrong, with him, with the other fugitives from the genteel tradition.

The English situation, at least for an American, is easier to talk about because the critical canons are simpler. There is, for instance, a cardinal rule: any novel which is filled with forebodings and alarms that are couched in fictional terms which make clear that nothing could ever go wrong, is hokum. Many Englishmen are dark and dour about the Future, and not just the future of the Union Jack either, but they look around them, apparently, and see the world of W. S. Gilbert and Sherlock Holmes. Hugh Sykes Davies, for example, tries to tell the

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story of an animal psychologist who sees that one major effect of radiation fallout is an accelerated rate of evolution among rats. After crawling through the London sewers for a time he disappears, leaving Us for Them. Grim stuff, surely, and a not uninteresting idea, but worthless when served up by an old school man straight out of Establishment detective fiction who spends his time on the lawn of an eminent scientist and who is given to talking like this: "I was nearly twenty years older than Andrew, and Mary was separated from Margaret by one of those landmarks in time which means so much more to women than they do to men—the age of thirty." But better writers than Davies have never found anything much better to do than demonstrate that Wodehouse's was probably as full a picture of England as anyone else's. There is Angus Wilson, whose latest book, *The Old Man at the Zoo,* was begun, according to the imagination of a friend of mine, with the following conversation:

First Friend. I think Wilson could write a book about anything.
Second Friend. Anything?
Wilson. Anything.
Second Friend. I'll bet you can't write a novel about the London Zoo in 1970.
Wilson. You're on—double if I finish in six weeks?

And he did it, every bit, down to the last caw of the macaw. Listen, this man *can* write about anything:

> However, we wrote to Jackley in New Guinea where he was collecting, only to learn he was on his way home—they understood he was stopping off in Bahrein to see if he could replace the two dugongs that had recently died.
>
> "Good God," Leacock cried, "Why on earth can't Falcon manage his own mammals?"
>
> It was not the time to remind him of mammalia that needed aquarium conditions.

Later, at the crisis of the novel, when the Uni-European government is about to bomb England, we have this from one of the Zoo's research assistants:

> "I say," she said, "this chap Beard seems to be off his chump. He's evacuated all the wallabies. He must know that Nutting's working on Marsupials. But to crown all he has the cheek to tell me that the tachyglossus was killed in some smashup. I don't know what Newton's going to think. I promised to look after his interests while he's away on this army business and now this fool's let the only living monotreme in the country get killed. Can't you suppress him or something."

Read as a book written on a bet, *The Old Men at the Zoo,* or at least

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the first half, is an exhilarating experience; I only wish I'd had the right idea when I was slogging my way through the agonies of Gerald Middleton and Meg Eliot. Read any other way, the book is impossible. The reviewers in this journal have always been quite firm about Wilson, but no one else has, so let it be said, except as minor recreation, his novels are frauds.

One must speak more softly of Muriel Spark. Few writers have enjoyed such a sudden rise to fame, few writers have so many different admirers. No one can dismiss her as Not a Real Novelist, and indeed, she is always, as the saying goes, diverting. Yet the anglophobic nag remains. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie,* which filled an issue of *The New Yorker* (that British periodical), is a splendidly assured novel about a Scottish spinster schoolteacher and her set of six admiring pupils, each one of whom is "famous for" something. Rose is famous for sex; at the beginning of the novel, when she is twelve, she is attractive but uninquisitive. Thus she plays no part in this piece of English Wit:

> "Miss Brodie says prime is best," Sandy said.
> "Yes, but she never got married like our mothers and fathers."
> "The don't have primes," said Sandy.
> "They have sexual intercourse," Jenny said.
> The little girls paused, because this was still a stupendous thought, and one which they had only lately lit upon; the very phrase and its meaning were new. It was quite unbelievable. Sandy said, then, "Mr. Lloyd had a baby last week. He must have committed sex with his wife."

Later, when she is sixteen, Rose becomes famous for sex when Mr. Lloyd paints her in the likeness of Miss Brodie, whom he loves passionately and hopelessly. Sandy realizes that Miss Brodie wants to make Rose the mistress of Mr. Lloyd and Sandy her informant about the affair, so Sandy becomes Mr. Lloyd's mistress herself. After she too is painted to look like Miss Brodie she "betrays" her teacher by telling the school authorities of her fascist politics. It is all wonderfully done, complete with fancy time shifts and a metronomic assurance that the word "prime" will appear on every page. The pervasive sense is of neatness; Mrs. Spark treats her characters like exquisite butterflies best seen when caught and mounted under glass. "You don't quite see the point yet?" is the insistent tone, "Do step over here under the light." No earnestness, no sense of inquiry mars the exhibition. Mrs. Spark could go on writing books like this one forever, and now she is Thoroughly Established one fears she may do just that.

Which is a terrible shame because the recurrent wish when the alternatives to the same old thing are examined is for a bit less earnestness and more of Mrs. Spark's elegance and grace. Vintila Horia, a Rumanian exile writing in French, and Mitchell Goodman, a dogged

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American type, both reconstruct historical worlds they never saw, both compel sympathy and even admiration, but both make it so hard. Horia's *God Was Born in Exile* is about Ovid's years at Tomi. His repudiation of Ovid's Roman years and erotic poetry, his insistence on having a wandering doctor who was present at Christ's birth come to tell his story, his attempt to see exile as a triumphant reply to civilization—all these mark him as the enemy of Muriel Spark, and even when his novel reads very much like *The Robe,* one is tempted to side with him. Goodman's *The End of It* has as its vehicle the initiation of an American lieutenant in the Italian campaign of 1943-1944; the technique is even more documentary than Horia's (there is a lot of Norman Corwin stuff and many passages unaccountably printed in italics). Like Horia, Goodman is best when offering a sense of an historical moment—his accounts of the different responses of the American, Italian, and French soldiers to the proud retreating Germans are fine. But the temptation mentioned above must be resisted. In both books the prose is so murky, the characters so wooden, the pretentiousness so unrewarding, the point of view finally so naive, that only a confirmed sentimentalist would prefer these to *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.*

But Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* does qualify as a real neanderthal American threat to civilized novel writing. The book is laid in roughly the same country as *The End of it*—it concerns fliers on a Mediterranean island whose commanding officer keeps raising the number of missions they must fly. The hero is Captain Yossarian who is going to live forever or die trying; others are Milo Minderbinder who turns the war into free enterprise ("There's an endive exporter in Palermo I have to see for a minute about a shipment of mushrooms to Bern that were damaged by mold"), and who makes a contract with the Germans to strafe his own airfield at cost plus six percent; an officer named Scheisskopf who is finally made a general because all he cares about is parades. As is quite clear, this is Satire, thoroughly American in conception, replete with highjinks and lavish virtuosity that admirers call the salvation of our malaise. Heller begins with brittle undergraduate wisecracks and then, wildly and patiently, he tells the same stories over and over, each time etching them a bit deeper until, in the central story's final retelling, the irony disappears, the savagery is subdued, and only cynicism and compassion remain. Heller's range is quite narrow—although he is rich and splendid within that range—and it is fair to say that if you don't find the first hundred pages funny you won't find the last hundred terrifying:

> She was a plump, pink, sluggish girl who read good books and kept urging Yossarian not to be so bourgeois without the *r*. . . . She was a crazy mathematics major from the Wharton School of Business who could not count to twenty-eight each month without getting into trouble.

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"Darling, we're going to have a baby again," she would say to Yossarian every month.

"You're out of your goddam head," he would reply.

"I mean it baby," she insisted.

"So do I."

"Darling, we're going to have a baby again," she would say to her husband.

"I haven't the time," Lieutenant Scheisskopf would grumble petulantly. "Don't you know there's a parade going on?"

But even if you don't like this kind of writing, there is some marvelous sex and Heller's technical originality is abundant and brilliant. I can't imagine him writing another novel anywhere near as good, but no matter—*Catch-22* is a genuinely new book.

This cannot be claimed for Clara Winston's *The Hours Together,* which is every inch a novel, a carefully and finely written story of a Viennese psychologist exiled in New York shortly after the war, his pathetic and lovely wife, and his chief patient, a young self-made engineer. Dr. Firstmann engulfs every refusal on the part of the world to match his dreams with sententious monologues on the need for psychic health, the place of food in an adult life, the need for correct order and arrangement. These answers are silly and boring but also wonderful in the way they enable the doctor and his wife to face the otherwise unfaceable. Mrs. Winston's touch here is always delicate yet her meticulousness often results simply in brittleness:

"Astonishing," she said.

"Yes, the Americans are in all technical matters highly gifted. It would amuse me greatly to see such a machine in action. He tells me, too, that in the reproduction of sound they have made great advances. He spoke at length of still another method, a so-called Higher Faithfulness, by which the very timbre of the concert hall may be retained."

But in the story of the engineer the writing stiffens and grows more dense, the analysis becomes more searching. Morton Kersh, who raised himself from the wilds of Brooklyn to "make good money" and marry a beautiful nagging wife is a magnificently rendered figure, every bit the equal of Bellow's Tommy Wilhelm as a picture of a genuinely lost soul. And the scene in which Kersh returns home after his first visit to Dr. Firstmann is a vision of horror as good as any in recent fiction, all the better because it is not self-consciously so. Kersh walks in and separates his younger son Howard from a fight with his nihilistic brother:

It wasn't fair to the kid, Morton Kersh often thought, to make him the punching bag. And sometimes he wondered if he loved the boy for himself, or only because that love was required of him to bring

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> out the worst in the other two, or required of him to heighten his own rage. Could love be a bad thing, a trick hate played on a man?

Then he carries Howard in to a bedroom strewn with toys and accidentally kicks a model locomotive:

> It hit a house and broke the snow-capped roof. Battering down a fence and crushing several horses, crashing like doom through what remained of civilization, Morton Kersh made his way to the twin bed which was Howard's. He dropped the child upon its tumble and sat down on its edge. . . . The war he took for granted was right here, in miniature and in a kind of fun which disproportionately agitated him. Will was at work, a mocking nihilism of which he felt himself the target. The bedclothes trailed from the maple youth beds. The drawers of the chests were pulled out and all their contents emptied, to mingle with the weapons, helmets, holsters, from the toy box. He noted that the newest pieces of the electric train set—the passenger cars with windows that lighted, the milk train which loaded and unloaded milk cans, the engine which puffed smoke and blew real warnings—even these ingenious additions to the set, still new and—he had stressed the fact—expensive, had been included in a planned catastrophe.

And on it goes for six more pages, each detail superbly rendered. If nothing else in the book quite matches this scene, nothing falls very far below it either: *The Hours Together* reminds us again that vision and intelligence can be fused.

But more must be said. None of these writers is yet a grown novelist and with the possible exception of Mrs. Winston, none will ever be. Horia and Goodman are stumblers, Heller is a confirmed juvenile delinquent—their most attractive qualities also are the reasons for believing they may not be able to steady and deepen their concerns. And one can think of many fine novels of recent years that offer the same sense of achievement and little promise—*Golk, Acrobat Admits, The Night of the Hunter, Invisible Man,* or, across the sea, *The Legacy, City of Spades, Harris' Requiem*—others could be added. There are also many writers for whom the lustre of one's hopes has become tarnished—Amis, Sillitoe, Mark Harris, Herbert Gold, Edward Loomis, Oakley Hall—again the list could be extended. It is difficult to pick up a new novel by any one of these and not feel shyness and trepidation temper the enthusiasm. Of genuine novelists whose books must be read because they wrote them, I can think of only two: Saul Bellow and Iris Murdoch. Others may have a candidate or two, but this is one list which could not be extended. This, it seems to me, is the central fact about our landscape. There are special "reasons" in every instance, I am sure, but the pattern is too unmistakably clear—and too patently the reverse of the situation of thirty years ago when there

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were, if that's possible, many novelists but few good novels—to be sloughed off that way. The real reasons for this condition lie out too far and in too deep for analysis here, but it is not too much to say that the best chronicler of the last ten years will be the one who finds those hidden sources.

But beyond all this, beyond the sentimental anglophobia and the hopes one must entertain for the authors of the better books of the term, lies Evelyn Waugh, who wrote his first book in the twenties, who was famous before most of the writers above were out of grade school, and who has just finished his trilogy about Guy Crouchback and the Second War. Admirers of the early Waugh are everywhere, most notably among those for whom English zaniness is the only extant form of high civilization. I gather these folk are somewhat reticent about this trilogy because it seems a little too serious and the better ripostes and the Fun are kept hidden, like the good liquor in the best bars. So it had better be made clear that *Men at Arms, Officers and Gentlemen,* and *The End of the Battle* is high art, almost every sentence a revelation that reading prose can be a liberating and civilizing act.

There are an almost staggering number of similarities between this work and Ford's *Parade's End.* Both are multi-volume works by English Catholics about the effects of war on the younger sons of Tory gentry, both see the death and rebirth of their hero's dreams as the natural result of a noble spirit meeting the anarchy and inanity that is war. Both can easily be condemned as sentimental evocations and both are saved from such a charge by the integrity and novelistic poise of their authors. Ford, of course, was right—after 1918 there would be no more parades, and I suspect Waugh realized this. Thus Guy Crouchback is a far less impressive figure than Christopher Tietjens, thus Guy's pleasure at finding a home in the Halberdiers in *Men at Arms,* as illuminated by Waugh, is a foolish as well as a splendid nostalgia. In *The End of the Battle* whatever story there ever was to tell is now over—Guy is back in England, feeling old and left behind, looking for some military post that will extricate him from the vulgar, Americanized mechanism that England has become. There is Lieutenant Padfield, the American who knows everybody and does nothing; Ludovic, the betrayer of Fido Hound in *Officers and Gentlemen,* who enters the literary world by writing dreadful little *pensées.* These Waugh can handle quietly, rather in the old manner:

> Ludovic was not fond of spirits, nor was whisky any rarity at his well-found station; nevertheless he accepted the offered drink with a solemnity which verged on reverence. This was no mere clandestine treat. Frankie was initiating him into the occult company of Logan and Kafka. He would find time in the days to come to learn who Kafka was. Now he drained the glass, swallowing almost without repugnance the highly valued distillation.

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But in this volume, perhaps the best of the three for all its apparent diffuseness, we are to move beyond this. First Guy meets his ex-wife who is pregnant by a man she despises, who wanders around cadging money, trying to get an abortion, every bit as lost as Guy himself until they meet and become friends. She is a tramp, but mindless and kind, and Waugh handles their coming together with a sympathy and sweetness that does not overlook her shallowness or make much of her final conversion to the Church just before she and Guy are remarried. Then Guy is sent to Jugoslavia as a liaison officer between the partisans and the British. He arrives not long before the Communist seizure of power which is, for both Guy and Waugh, unmitigated disaster. He thus has little to do except to see after the repatriation of a group of Jewish refugees who are scorned because they don't look or act like Maria Schell in *The Last Bridge*. Here Waugh is at his finest, insisting on the goodness and folly and futility of his hero. There is one couple, the Kanyis, whom Guy liked especially and who wanted to go to Australia:

> The Commandant sent his interpreter to inquire while he took Guy into the shed he called his mess, and gave him a drink. Presently the man returned. "All correct, sir. The Kanyis never left Begoy. They got into some kind of trouble there and were jugged."
>
> "May I go with the interpreter and ask about it?"
>
> "By all means, old man. But aren't you making rather heavy weather of it? What do two more or less matter?"
>
> Guy went into the compound with the interpreter. Some of the Jews recognised him and crowded round him with complaints and petitions. All he could learn about the Kanyis was that they had been taken off the truck by the partisan police just as it was about to start.
>
> He took the question to Major Marchpole.
>
> "We don't really want to bother the Jugs any more. They really co-operated very well about the whole business. Besides the war's over now in that part. There's no particular point in moving people out. We're busy at the moment moving people in." This man was in fact at that moment busy dispatching Royalist officers—though he did not know it—to certain execution.

There is self-indulgence in that last sentence, but the rest, like almost the whole book, is free and the reticence is only at rare moments a sign of self-pity. What is finally so impressive about *The End of the Battle* is that in its triumph is the triumph of a mature novelist who has learned precisely what he can and cannot do, who has worked at and pruned his prose until it is an instrument of great precision. Compared to the really great writers of this century Waugh tends to pale and his metier becomes too special. But for the writers thirty years his junior who are not content with a single burst of energy he offers shining testimony, almost unique, of the possibilities for being a novelist.

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MARIUS BEWLEY

Problems of the Literary Biographer

MR. MARK SCHORER'S NEW LIFE of Sinclair Lewis[1] belongs to that peculiarly American genre of writing known as the "definitive" biography. His publishers announce it; the length of the book (two thirds as long as Boswell's *Johnson;* 867 pages) proclaims it. The book was conceived for distinction, and it has been brought forth to applause. The nature of the "definitive" biography as conceived by blurb writers and some reviewers will be commented on below, but one characteristic of these books may be mentioned here. The biographer-critic or artist, who should be in control, gives way to the chronicler of the quotidian; an extended analysis of the subject's artistic production is likely to give way to the address of his tailor or the school of his analyst. In short, we learn everything except what it is important for us to know.

I mention this shortcoming of the "definitive" American biography as we have come to know it in order to say at once that in several important respects Mr. Schorer's book is a happy exception. He has included too much trivia—several hundred pages too much. But he has also given us a fine critical analysis and evaluation of Lewis as an artist. When we have broken our way through the unpruned biographical irrelevancies, we find ourselves in the presence of a comprehensive critical statement, fine enough, judicious enough, to revive the spent spirit.

As an artist Lewis does not present a difficult case. "Perhaps it is futile," Mr. Schorer says at one point, "to approach any Lewis novel as a work of art." This is the cornerstone of his critical edifice, and while the observation is perhaps easily made, it is right. Most of all, it must have required critical courage to state so simply such a truth about a novelist to whom one has just dedicated nine years of one's life. Nothing is easier to concede than that Lewis never rose to an artist, but the case is, after all, more complicated than that. The four or five major novels retain, even today, a gaily gruesome attraction, and while *Elmer Gantry* is by no means Lewis' best work, there are many better American novels one would more willingly relinquish. In odd and oblique ways, American art would be much poorer without these artless books. It is his sense of this paradox that gives strength to Mr. Schorer's evaluation.

Part of Lewis' appeal arises from the fact that he seems to write from a much earlier American world than that of his contemporaries, and his satiric bitterness is qualified by a nostalgic glow. Mr. Schorer

[1] SINCLAIR LEWIS: AN AMERICAN LIFE, by *Mark Schorer*. McGraw-Hill. $10.

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analyzes this quality well when, commenting on certain tensions in Lewis' sensibility, he writes:

> It is precisely this complex of qualities in the novels of Sinclair Lewis that marks him as having been formed before 1914 and sets him off so sharply from the only slightly younger writers who matured during the First World War and were publishing their exciting early books—*The Great Gatsby, The Sun Also Rises, Manhattan Transfer, Soldier's Pay*—simultaneously with Lewis's big ones. The same complex of qualities revealed in the early novels remains in the big books and all through his decline to his last novel in 1951, and beside the work of these younger men, even in the 1920s, even the big books already seemed in some ways curiously old-fashioned. It was an older America than theirs that Lewis loved and praised and chided, and an older vision that supported his effort.

In fact, what one assumes to have been Lewis' satiric formula in creating characters like Babbitt and Dodsworth had been more than anticipated as early as James Fenimore Cooper's satiric novels. Steadfast Dodge from *Homeward Bound* (1838) might have come straight from Gopher Prairie or Zenith:

> Mr. Dodge came from that part of the country in which men were accustomed to think, act, almost to eat and drink and sleep, in common; or, in any other words, from one of those regions in America, in which there was so much community, that few had the moral courage, even when they possessed the knowledge, and all the other necessary means, to cause their individuality to be respected. When the usual process of conventions, sub-conventions, caucuses, and public meetings did not supply the means of a 'concentrated action,' he and his neighbors had long been in the habit of having recourse to societies, by way of obtaining 'energetic means,' as it was termed; and from his tenth year up to his twenty-fifth, this gentleman had been either a president, vice-president, manager, or committee-man, of some philosophical, political, or religious expedient to fortify human wisdom, make men better, and resist error and despotism. His experience had rendered him expert in what may well enough be termed the language of association. No man of his years, in the twenty-six States, could more readily apply the terms of 'taking up'—'excitement'—'unqualified hostility'—'public opinion'—'spreading before the public'—or any other of those generic phrases that imply the privileges of all, and the rights of none.

Cooper's prose is not distinguished; his intelligence is. The similarities of Dodge with Lewis' boosters are marked, but there are even more marked differences between the two authors' attitudes. For Cooper, Dodge is only contemptible, and the laughter dies away thinly in the recognition of the threat this kind of creature poses to American civili-

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zation. Dodge is completely framed by Cooper's hatred. But as Schorer recognizes, there is a curious affinity between Lewis and Babbitt that gradually moves towards identification. In *Main Street* and *Babbitt,* satiric purpose wanes. Perhaps it was never really there at all. Small town values and Rotary triumph benignly in the end. It is this ambivalence of attitude that guaranteed Lewis' great public success. It also guaranteed his ultimate failure as an artist, and worst of all, his tragic failure as a human being.

Mr. Schorer's account of Lewis' preparations and research for the major novels is valuable. The pages devoted to his research for *Elmer Gantry* among the ministers of Kansas City are not only as entertaining as the novel, they lift anecdotage to a level of illuminating critical comment. It is when Mr. Schorer turns his attention from the work to the man that one has some serious doubts, and here it will be necessary to return briefly to the American bias for "definitive" biography, which might better be termed "catchall." The merits of these biographies vary greatly among themselves, but several generalizations may be made. Length, (perhaps better still, poundage) is regarded as a virtue in itself. The researching or collecting rather than the evaluating intelligence is esteemed, and its invidious presence is exhibited everywhere by the undiscriminating accumulation of *facts* collected with the passion of a jackdaw. So much attention is paid to background that the foreground often becomes a blur. Relevance is lost, focus distorted, perspective ignored. My favourite passage from one of these books comes from the definitive life of Emerson:

> If William Emerson could have found time during the overcrowded hours of May 25 to make the rounds of the waterfront and the chief business streets, he would unquestionably have been impressed by the rich stores of goods for sale. . . . Shops and warehouses were crowded with a bewildering variety of desirable things: silk ribbons, men's silk hats, Italian artificial flowers, Roman violin strings, marble chimney pieces with hearths to match, thousands of excellent Havana segars, fine flour, first and second quality ship bread, haddock, pollock, herring, mackerel, hundreds of quintals of codfish and barrels of alewives and hogsheads of molasses, boxes of white and brown Havana sugar, Canton sugar, Calcutta sugar, Welsh's fresh chocolate, numerous chests of fragrant hyson and hyson skin and bohea and Souchong tea, tons of the best green coffee, bottled cider, pipes of country gin and Rotterdam gin, St. Vincent's rum, cherry rum, New England rum, St. Kitt's and Granada rum, London porter, cognac, sherry, Madeira, Lisbon and Vidonia and Malaga wines, Bordeaux claret, table beer and strong beer by the barrel, kegs of tobacco, boxes of Turkish figs, prunes, muscatel raisins, fresh oranges, lemons, apricots, Baltimore flour, Richmond flour, pork, casks of rice, nuts, seeds, tons of whale oil, Georgia upland cotton and cotton from the Carolinas, hemp, bales of Madras handkerchiefs, plushes, umbrellas,

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> fans, gloves, hose, ear jewels, ear hoops and knots, English and Genevan watches, finger rings, knee buckles, swords and hangers, gold and silver and tinsel epaulettes, satins, laces, broadcloths, calicoes, ginghams, cassimeres, chintz, Marseille quiltings, sprigged and tamboured muslin, long lawns, Irish linens, sheeting, diapers, shawls, black and coloured hats for men, razors, straw hats and bonnets as high as $15 each, fancy rosettes, veils, cloaks, mantels, silk gloves, superfine fancy colored kid gloves and shoes of the same material, sewing silks of all kinds, nankeens, dimities, elegant morocco and cabinet work, shaving and dresses cases, satteen wood tea caddies with cut glass sugar basins, elegant family medicine chests, paints and water colors in scores of varieties.

One is impressed by the extensive research among old lading bills and the advertisements of ancient Boston newspapers that must have gone towards the compiling of this list, no less than one is surprised at the materiality of the thoughts that were engaging the mind of Emerson's father the morning he took that hypothetical walk. But surely it would be better to sacrifice the "definitive" in such a passage to the interests of the relevant. Mr. Schorer is not, perhaps, guilty of this kind of excess, but neither is he altogether innocent. I find the footnote with which he ends his book interesting in this respect. It is concerned with weather conditions in Rome the day Sinclair Lewis died, and it says in part:

> It may still have been raining on January 10, 1951. Roman weather reports, even on outlying districts like Monte Mario, are no doubt available to anyone who wishes to continue these researches. *Per me ho finito.*

The sigh of relief with which Schorer must have ended his nine years of labour seems clearly registered in the concluding sentence. And his specific suggestion for continued research into the "climate" of Lewis' background I like to think of as ironical. But then again, in view of much of the evidence provided by the biographical portions of the book, one wonders.

In dealing with the novels Mr. Schorer discovered exactly the right attitude: the stance of the good crtic who is dedicated to his task, and who knows perfectly what he wants to say. The problem of finding the proper attitude towards Lewis himself is much more difficult, and here the role of literary critic is not entirely helpful. It is not until the closing pages when Mr. Schorer approaches Lewis with something of the imaginative insight of the novelist that a satisfactory relation is established between them. During much of the book Mr. Schorer seems to be hiding his embarrassment with Lewis' personality by concentrating on "definitive" spadework until the uncovered data towers so high we almost lose sight of Lewis himself. Mr. Schorer, in a rather dry analysis of Lewis' character, puts his finger on the difficulty:

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> One might list his conflicting qualities in opposite columns and suggest that there were two selves in Sinclair Lewis; but all these qualities existed together and simultaneously in him, and in their infinite, interacting combinations there must have been not two but six or eight or ten or two hundred selves and, because they could never be one, a large hole in the centre. When he peered into that, what could we expect him to see?

A much more interesting question for us is what we could expect Mr. Schorer to see. Confusion is not complexity, a mere multiplicity of "selves" is not richness of organization, and one understands that a personality dominated by "a large hole in the centre" will not easily become the beautiful form of any book of which it is the subject. But it is more difficult to understand why Mr. Schorer decided to throw vast —*really vast!*—quantities of literary refuse in the form of anecdotes, gossip, and circumstantial detail, down that hole in the hopes of filling it up. The hole remains as empty as ever because, as Mr. Schorer knows so well, Lewis had no real artistic or creative identity at all.

It is interesting to inquire why, in the last pages, Schorer is able to deal so much more satisfactorily with Lewis than in the earlier parts. I believe it is because he finds it possible to place the human wreck that Lewis became in a literary context at last, to see him as a part of a pattern larger than himself. Perhaps it is too much to ask anyone to relate Sinclair Lewis the best selling novelist, the bumptious Rotarian, the American boob, to any significant literary meaning. The imagination balks. Paradoxically, the dying alcoholic, wracked with delirium tremens and suffering from a painful skin disease, distrusting and rejecting his friends, is a more impressive man than Schorer has had to deal with before. At the end, Lewis may not assume the dignity of a tragic character, but the horror of that death seems laden with meaning. At one point Schorer quotes Hemingway's well known remark: "We do not have great writers. Something happens to our writers at a certain age. . . . You see we make our writers into something very strange. . . . We destroy them in many ways." It comes as something of a shock that it is Sinclair Lewis of all our writers who proves this most in our century—more even than Hart Crane and Scott Fitzgerald. That Mr. Schorer makes this clear in the last part of the book is one of his achievements, but that the earlier parts of the book are not directed towards this discovery more consciously and deliberately is unfortunate. But this, of course, is one of the penalties of being "definitive."

But it is graceless to complain because when Mr. Schorer does make his point, it is made with a macabre magnificence I have not encountered since the chimpanzee's funeral in *Sunset Boulevard*. The remarkable description of Lewis' first heart-attack in Florence has become my favourite piece of American Gothic writing:

> Parties . . . did not interest him very much any more, as, alone in his

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house, he slumped into a long bout of reckless, solitary drinking. Then finally, on one wild stormy December night, a telephone call came from Lady Una Troubridge to Dr. Vincenzo Lapiccirella, a distinguished and cultivated Florentine diagnostician and cardiologist. He must come at once to Villa La Costa! The wind roared in the cypresses, rain tumbled from the black skies in torrents, the doctor lost his way and found it again, came finally to the great door and pounded on it only to have it opened and slammed in his face by a servant who did not know that he had been called. A dog came bounding round the corner of the house and added its barking to the tumult. The doctor pounded again, this time to be admitted and to meet Alexander Manson, who took him to the upper floor. Past the two bathrooms out of Hollywood (one apple-green, one orchid, the two separated by a wall consisting chiefly of an illuminated aquarium in which huge goldfish lazily swam back and forth) he entered the master bedroom, a large chamber that, with all its new green-and-gold furniture in heavy Renaissance imitation, seemed crowded. Here there was no respite from the gilt: on the doors, on the ceiling, on the fireplace, on the wide headboard of the bed where lay this incredibly ugly man, red-faced and drunk. He had suffered his first heart attack. . . .

Dr. Lapiccirella, who had seen some lepers, feared that it was leprosy that afflicted Lewis, and he took him to Dr. Marcello Comel, one of the finest dermatologists in Europe, who was then in the medical school at Pisa.

I suspect that this passage will fix the image of Sinclair Lewis in our imagination, just as few of us ever think of Bertrans de Born except as Dante saw him in Hell with his severed head swinging like a lantern from his hand. We are amazed to find that Lewis had such potentialities in him after all. The exaggerated theatricality—the roaring cypresses, the black torrents, the barking dog, the fantastic baths—are right. No other inverted commas could possibly enclose this literary career, at the end, in its proper, final frame. And Dr. Lapiccirella's ghastly suspicion has, in context at least, the effect of a symbolic judgment reaching all the way back to Sauk Centre, Minnesota.

Mr. Schorer's publishers refer to this biography as "a monumental study." It is. But I hope that sometime Mr. Schorer will add a couple of months to the nine years he has already devoted to it, and chip out the perfect book on Sinclair Lewis that is at present walled up in its "definitive" crypt, and screaming to be freed.

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RICHARD FOSTER

The Poetics of Selfhood

MR. PEARCE TELLS US THAT his book[1] about American poetry is an "inside narrative" that "mediates between 'cultural history' and 'criticism.' " He goes on to say that " 'literary history' in this study is 'literature *as* history' " in order to prepare his reader to discover that *The Continuity of American Poetry* is less concerned with the "facts" of literary history than with the dialectics, the pulsations, the currents and counter-currents (to use two of Pearce's own favorite terms) of the life of American imagination as it has been lived by men and articulated by poets. The key moral dialectic found by Mr. Pearce is the American poet's typical struggle, arising out of his American instinct toward a religion of Man, to reconcile "the impulse to freedom with the impulse to community." And the historical failure to achieve, imaginatively, that reconciliation, gives rise to a second, formal as well as moral dialectic in American poetry—the "Adamic" *versus* the "mythic" poem. The book's purposes are bent toward comparative discernment and definition of these patterns as they materialize, through affirmation or denial, in the work of certain American poets from Puritan times to the present.

The assumptions that underlie *The Continuity,* in spite of their distinctly American and "modern" applications, are themselves anciently traditional in their tendency to subordinate the idea of the artist-as-craftsman to the idea of the artist-as-spokesman. Thus, Pearce's sense of the inadequacy of the New Critic's formalistic answer to the theoretical question (actually, both question and answer are Allen Tate's), "To whom is the poet responsible?":

> And they answer: Not to whom, but to what? Then: To language. I submit that we cannot stop here. For, above all in poetry, language transmits *values:* an awareness of the infinite degree of choice involved in being "for" or "against" something; of wanting or not wanting it, of desiring or fearing it, and also the means of knowing, projecting, and judging that awareness.[2]

And so the poet, in ideal self-realization, is the tongue of the people; he

[1] THE CONTINUITY OF AMERICAN POETRY, by *Roy Harvey Pearce.* Princeton University Press. $7.50.

[2] Of course, the New Critics themselves had always known this particular truth, as their work began to show about a decade and a half ago. It was just that history had demanded their formalist emphasis at an earlier stage in order to make possible not only the necessity but also the success of exactly the kind of humanistic emphasis that history now demands of Mr. Pearce. To see this fact is to see that the history of poetry and the history of criticism are somehow, for better or for worse, the history of one life.

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utters truth in beauty; he is creator, prophet, priest and celebrant of human possibility:

> Out of high art issues a new sense of the possibilities for men to live fully in the "real" world. Accordingly, the end of high art is achieved as its formal qualities lead its audience into assenting to the possibilities which it creates.

With poetry and its function thus conceived, American poetry of the nineteenth century, born of the raw facts of American history, is seen by Mr. Pearce as a poetry not merely about self, but literally *of* self:

> The poet had to make a self-induced blindness to poetry a means to poetic insight. Through his own sense of the anti-poetic life of men in his society, he had to make its possible Man an actuality: as poet he had virtually to create Man.

For Mr. Pearce, therefore,—and this is a second major assumption integral to his book, so deeply integral that the word "assumption" is hardly adequate to express its immanence everywhere in *The Continuity* —poetry is not art, but *life*. Poems are not icons or well-wrought urns into which the poet's self has disappeared, but rather poems are *selves,* or aspects of selves, discovered or created *living*.

It is in the light of such felt beliefs about the nature of poetry at large that Mr. Pearce discerns the special continuities of American poetry. He begins by discussing Puritan poetry as a poetry of theocentrically conceived human community, and proceeds to show that the Puritan belief in the availability of God's law to universal human perception contains the fertile seed, as in the poetry of Edward Taylor, of the predominantly "egocentric" or "antinomian" poetry of the American romantic movement. Joel Barlow, who failed in his attempt to write an American epic in the classical manner, also looks toward the romantics in his vision of "one living language" of the future out of which the American epic might some day be written. What this language eventually embodies in the work of Whitman and his later followers is a peculiarly American transformation of epic substance and style into poems "which will create rather than celebrate a hero and which will make rather than recall the history that surrounds him." *Song of Myself* is the first great American "surrogate" for epic, and it is "transformative" in that its ad-libbed movement toward the recognition of an as yet uncreated self discovers the potential for the heroic in the reader's self. Crane, epic magician of the "multitudinous Verb," and Williams, the "great nominalist" of *Paterson,* follow in Whitman's wake to create their own versions of the epic of selfhood. Pound, whose *Cantos* splinter identity into multiplicity and discontinuity so as to rediscover history as the corrective and matrix of ego, is the "counter-current" to the basic style of Whitman and his progeny. But Pound's very consciousness of his counter-purpose and of his reactive relationship to Whitman, which

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is amply documented by Mr. Pearce, makes him vividly integral with the continuity of American poetry. Poe, on the other hand, was "a kind of culture hero of the imagination" whose creativity was based on a rejection and denial of those actualities of American life which Whitman transformed by illuminating in them the possibility of heroism. But the popular poets of the nineteenth century, from Freneau and Bryant to the people's poets of high-bourgeois New England and post-bellum South, chose for status quo community and the given democratic idea of Man—for actuality rather than possibility. As patriarchs of the tribe they created a respectable and derivative poetry of confirmation and assent because, for them, "poetry was the highest form of politics."

Mr. Pearce discusses most of the important American poets in terms of their individual relationship to these basic themes of selfhood and community and their corresponding basic styles, the Adamic and the mythic. Among the best essays is the one on Emerson, which without apology or condescension gives him the full and serious critical consideration that as one of our best lyric poets he has always deserved. Another especially important essay is the one on Robinson, the poet of the "exhaustion and failure" of the egocentric mode, whose people expend self in the lonely struggle merely to survive, and whose poems about them have the insular form of the lives they describe—ends in themselves rather than beginnings toward something beyond. There are fresh and revealing commentaries, too, on Emily Dickinson, Frost, Marianne Moore, and Ransom and Tate, as well as on further aspects of the work of Whitman, Pound, and Williams. But perhaps the single most impressive section of the book—and in spite of the amount that has been written in recent years, I know of nothing as serious and just and perceptive on the subject—is the section on Wallace Stevens. Stevens' poetry is seen as a magnificent contradictory analogue to the poetry of Eliot: it sings of the creation of self in the endlessly failing effort to discover self ("The poem of the mind in the act of finding / What will suffice"), as Eliot's sings of the salvation of self in the endlessly failing effort to abnegate it.

The Continuity of American Poetry is the kind of book, I think, that does more than inform or change one's mind. It literally *moves* one to insight, to see what one has not seen before; and it does this not by weight of scholarship nor ingenuity of critical technique, though these are present, but ultimately by a kind of tense and heated urgency of involvement with its subject. Like a poet, Mr. Pearce strives to illumine what lies dark, to utter the unuttered. And so, throughout the book he is principally concerned with (to use the terms with which he lays open the strata of Emerson's essay on "The Poet") the "latent" rather than the "manifest" content of the poems under his scrutiny—their "significance" in the light of the significance of our history which they themselves created out of its mere factuality. And the chief rhetorical, or poetic, means by which he helps us to see these shadowed

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latencies is the light generated by exhaustive comparison, as in this passage on the techniques of Whitman and Pound:

> The principle of form and technique in the *Cantos* is so deliberately opposed to that in Whitman's poetry that the one is vitalized by the other, if only by virtue of a certain resistance. The opposition is between a poet who would infuse his world with a sense of self and then, and only then, accept it, and a poet who would infuse his self with a sense of his world. Where Whitman would energize so as to define, Pound would define so as to energize. *Song of Myself* is phased according to the movement of a creative, expressive sensibility; the *Cantos* are constellated according to the ordering of a precision-grinding, exacting, sensibility. In Whitman it is too often impossible to distinguish expression from mere response; in Pound, expression from mere observation.

The very structure of *The Continuity of American Poetry,* as a matter of fact, the principle of its development and coherence, is based on comparison, which is a chief means of defining identity. And of course the book is all about identity, about human possibility, about the poetics of selfhood discovered by our poetry.

But there are occasions for regret, if only in passing, as one reads this remarkable book. It sometimes falls short of its own high standards. I do not refer to those rather flat, rather ordinary stretches common to all histories (in *The Continuity* these are usually the sections on the bad or lesser poets who provide the interstices between the great or significant figures, or who are set up as foils to them); one expects this kind of thing—it is the transitional matter of a discourse. But a true failing of literary histories, perhaps especially of an "inside" one, is their tendency sometimes to let the momentum of "continuity" overwhelm the prerogatives of judgment. Pearce's book is on the whole free from this fault, with the exceptions, perhaps, of the section on Poe, a bad poet whose "significance," which is far more interesting than his bad poetry, has been more amply explored by other commentators (such as Allen Tate and William Carlos Williams), and the section on Eliot, in which the too tremblant extolling of his poetry appears to stem mainly from Mr. Pearce's sense of the splendidly ironic part it performs in the larger dance.

But I am most troubled by two omissions, not just because the omitted are personal favorites of mine, but because their ghosts obtrude themselves in the currents and counter-currents of Mr. Pearce's book, and shape their directions, in ways that Mr. Pearce should see. Melville, first of all, is omitted, and with the puzzling justification that his poetic achievement is neither sizeable enough nor of sufficient artistic weight. I think now his shorter poems have come to seem of near major importance to most commentators, and even if this general opinion is discounted, *Clarel* begs for consideration in the context of Mr. Pearce's speculations about American epic. Furthermore, the mere fact of the

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then forgotten writer's private, almost secret, publication of his poetry makes one wonder how Mr. Pearce could have resisted an encounter with him in the midst of the brutal and barren 1880's and 90's—an interregnum, as Mr. Pearce describes it, of non-poets and "creative" poets. And Mr. Pearce also omits Robinson Jeffers (I found no mention of him at all in the book), an older poet of stature now undeservedly ignored, and a poet who speaks to Mr. Pearce's themes often with beauty, always with ineluctable relevance. As I read the splendid sections on Stevens' poetry as a poetry of the Adamic point-of-no-return, I felt that Jeffers' poetry was there in the background—a destructive counter-voice singing the same discovery in its own savage modes.

The Continuity of American Poetry is so intelligent, so alive, that one's criticisms of it are in the nature of wishing there were more of it. But its very themes demand that it be an unfinished book. It ends, but does not conclude, with an Afterword which raises the question, What next? The tentative answer is that the younger poets writing now express a humanism that is less desperate, if less inspired, broader, if less profound than that of their immediate forebears; that their humanism, in both its traditional and its radical forms, is a humanism of men rather than of Man. A book about a continuity, a drift, could hardly be expected not to be prophetic. And a book as committed in spirit as this one is to a liberal, even a romantic humanism could hardly be expected to deny itself a final note of optimism. But my own feeling is that, with certain exceptions, the poetry of the present moment tends to be humanly false, to be sentimental and manufactured—decadent without the ironic strengths of a self-knowing decadence. When I think of the poetry of the younger poets, I think of Mr. Pearce's characterization of the state of poetry in the 1880's—non-poets and "creative" poets, and little else, with the best of them rather like present-day Longfellows and Whittiers, though lacking the Great Audience. And these best *want* to grow, and so they change subjects, and suddenly these fresher, truer, tougher subjects die, in their hands, into yet further extensions of "technique."

This, at any rate, is what I see as present fact; and what I see does not accord with what Mr. Pearce seems at least to foresee. And yet, if the validity of the spirit of his book goes as deep as I believe it goes, it participates in and expresses a rising current in the life of the imagination that may indeed become what he already sees it becoming. And this is to say that the fittest audience of all for this important book, the audience to which it speaks most urgently, is perhaps the poet writing now. It is a book that shows the poet what he is doing. But this is also to say that it shows him *why* he must do what he does, and thus that its theme is also the theme of the poet's audience—the theme, as Mr. Pearce declares near the end of the book, of "the dignity of man . . . —how achieved, and at what cost." The importance of *The Continuity of American Poetry* lies in the fact that it is a supremely conscious moment in the continuing history which is its subject.

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DENIS DONOGHUE

God on Chevauchée

GOD HAS NOT BEEN DOING WELL in the English theatre since Chance began to get the star-parts. Dr. Weales has written a big book[1] to document His career from *Saints and Sinners* (1884) to *The Elder Statesman* (1959). He (Dr. Weales) begins with Jones's play because, or so he argues, it "reintroduced the possibility of religion as a serious consideration in the English drama." And he gives a detailed account of the Church Drama movement "which begins in modern times roughly with William Poel's revival of *Everyman* (1901)." The plays of Eliot and Fry are "related" to these two distinguishable streams.

The thesis is 'interesting,' but I can see little advantage in its adoption. "To keep the study within bounds" Dr. Weales has dealt only with English drama, and when he says English he means English. He includes *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* but not *Purgatory, Calvary,* or *The Resurrection;* summarises the plot of Jerome K. Jerome's *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* and says not a word of *The Crucible.* He does not cheat; if you sit in on this game you play by his rules, and this is the scholar-critic's inalienable right. But it is not an exciting game. I have no inside information about the motives which propelled Dr. Weales to write this book, but I cannot believe (unless he insists) that it is a book which he *wanted to* write. It strikes me very much as a doctoral dissertation, a 'good topic,' which one praises as thorough and highly competent. It has been well 'done,' but the doing is valuable only as personal discipline, scholarly method, 'a chapter in theatrical history': this is a book to which one may confidently 'refer.'

By *religion* Dr. Weales means to imply "some concept of God, usually that of an established church or belief," but many of the plays examined in the book, he remarks acutely, "are not religious in any sense," they are here because "they carry the socially recognizable marks of religion in England—the church, the clergyman, the Bible, the invocation of God." He himself has "no axe to grind"; (which convinces me yet again that to write a good book the possession of an axe capable of being ground is essential).

Dr. Weales's book is not in any strict sense 'critical'; it is quantitative, informative, extensive, if not encyclopedic. It gives a lot of information about plays and productions many of which are unlikely ever again to be discussed: in that sense it is at once generous and definitive:

[1] RELIGION IN MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA, by *Gerald Weales.* University of Pennsylvania Press. $7.50.

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> Miss M. Creagh-Henry may be taken as representative of the religious drama movement of the twenties, even though the group that she operated with Miss D. Marten—the Mystical Players—did not begin to present plays until the summer of 1929.

(*I hadn't adverted to that.*) The dramatists discussed at length are Shaw, Williams (Charles, not that American), Dorothy Sayers, T. S. Eliot, and Christopher Fry. Briefer mention attends upon Pinero, Hall Caine, Besier, Ervine, Maugham, Phillips, Auden and Isherwood, and many, many more. Most of these pages are depressing to read and must have been extremely frustrating to write: if the plan of your book forces you to give 25 pages to Shaw, 22 to Charles Williams, 14 to Dorothy Sayers, and 21 to Eliot, what can you do, what can you *say*? Take Eliot; you have to 'place' him at the confluence of your two distinguishable streams, and this takes a certain amount of space and doing, and then you have to say something interesting about each of the plays, and time is running out and you know that on, say, *The Cocktail Party* practically every critic in the business from Arrowsmith through Wimsatt has done his full-length essay, so who can blame you for turning in a neutral, no-axe-to-grind version of what Fr. William Lynch said in *Thought* ten years ago? The Plan is wrong. I blame the Plan.

I can only assume that Dr. Weales was badly advised. Left to his own resources he would produce the deft, firm criticism which he has been contributing to recent issues of this magazine; his observations on Albee, for instance, or his unrhetorical question, "Whatever happened to Jean-Paul Sartre?". Ensnared in his own or someone else's Plan he has written—all right, out with it—a tedious and unnecessary book. In the Preface he acknowledges the assistance of two scholars from Columbia University who read the manuscript in its first form; one of them is a famous theatre-critic who should have known better and given better advice.

From the entire book I would salvage the pages on Shaw and on Charles Williams. These are very good general essays, tough enough to chew if not to grind an axe. I agree with Dr. Weales's high estimate of *Major Barbara* and only wish that he had spoken out like that more frequently. He does Charles Williams a certain injustice in mating him with Dorothy Sayers in Ch. VIII, but he makes it up to him by naming him "not only the most original, but also the most exciting of the modern religious playwrights." Well, yes, but on second thought how exciting is that? I have never seen a Williams play performed, and the thought of a Kazan (say) production of *Judgement at Chelmsford* is a beautiful weirdie, but I recall that a reading of the play did nothing to stimulate either my love of God or my passion for Theatre. Dr. Weales's estimate of Williams is not mine, but I would die to preserve his right to proclaim it; especially as a firm, vigorous statement of any

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kind was precisely what his book needed at that moment. I would also welcome from Dr. Weales—now that he has his book safely behind him—an essay defining the relation between religion and modern drama, and indicating briefly what the whole story amounts to. My own contribution to this topic would consist of the few remarks which occupy the next paragraph.

Since 1884—Dr. Weales's chosen date—a remarkable number of bad plays have been written from worthy motives. These motives have included the preservation of the Christian religion in which I believe and on which I grind my axe. The Christian dramatists have for the most part been confused by any or all of the following considerations; the vaguely understood relation between ancient religion, ritual, and drama; the parallel association of drama and religion with the Sublime; the resemblance between the Sacrifice of the Mass and a certain kind of theatrical performance; the resemblance between a religious congregation and an ideal theatre-audience; the desire to give religious feeling a public manifestation in an increasingly secular world. The Christian dramatists for the most part ignored the fact that—I am now paraphrasing Susanne Langer in *Feeling and Form*—the arts had never been bound to ritual or religion or myth, but flourished in sacred realms only "as long as the human spirit was concentrated there": when the human spirit ceased to be concentrated there, the arts severed the sacred relation and sought nourishment elsewhere. (I do not know where the human spirit is now concentrated, and I fear that it is not concentrated anywhere.) The Christian dramatists also ignored the fact that in the twentieth century most of the religious connotations of Action and Passion are unemployed; hence the attempt in such diverse plays as *A Man for All Seasons, Luther, Galileo, Murder in the Cathedral,* and *Curtmantle* to remind us that men lived by sturdier images. Christian drama has also been vitiated by its inability —or refusal—to say "yes" to the actual human hazard on this earth. In 1935 Mr. Eliot spoke of "the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life": I do not like his phrasing and I consider it bad Christianity because it argues a withdrawal of value from the full temporal experience; but let that rest. Mr. Eliot's human image in *The Elder Statesman* is more Christian than in his other plays, and I welcome this as his current view of life and only wish it were more energetically propelled. What baffles me is that he did not see, years ago, the contradiction between the theatre's assent to human life and his own Manichean insistence that the natural and the supernatural are discontinuous. I now wonder whether the whole well-meaning endeavour to insinuate Christianity into the world via the modern theatre—even Mr. Eliot's supersubtle strategy of the oblique approach—was not from the beginning a mistake. The dramatists tried too hard and laboured at the wrong object. The dramatist who is a Christian should perfect his

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Christianity, then let it take care of itself, and devote himself to the dense, wayward reality of human life. The rest is not his business.

The most typical—not the best—pages in Dr. Weales's book deal with Christopher Fry. The method is genteel paraphrase, an occasional discrimination, fragments of biography, and an incorrigible charity which takes the intention for the achievement. Roughly, the verdict is that as modern English playwrights go Mr. Fry goes very well; Dr. Weales silently agrees with Mr. Arrowsmith (this magazine, Vol. III, 1950, p. 208) that the verbal business is mostly genuine disclosure of attitude, affirmation, hope, benevolence, joy, miracle. He agrees with everybody that Mr. Fry's writing since *A Sleep of Prisoners* has been toned down a good deal, but he does not say what this means in terms of attitude, affirmation, hope, joy, *et al.* If the verbal larkiness meant Mr. Fry's "approach to man and God," what is denoted by the new restraint? Sackcloth-and-ashes? Perhaps we can make some headway by taking a look at Mr. Fry's new play; the toning-down began in *A Sleep of Prisoners,* continued in *The Dark is Light Enough,* and now we have the text of *Curtmantle.*[2]

It might have been called "Snapshots of the Life and Times of Henry the Second." Mr. Fry may have glanced at Tennyson, Binyon, Eliot, and Anouilh before reading Mrs. J. R. Green, but he has taken his material mostly from such sources as the *Itinerarium* of Giraldus Cambrensis and William Fitz-Stephen's *Life of Becket* as quoted in Amy Kelly's *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings* (Harvard, 1950). For instance, in Ch. XIII of Miss Kelly's book we have the following, drawn from Fitz-Stephen:

> "My heart tells me", said Becket, "that I shall see you no more in this life."
>
> Henry read his thought. "Dost take me for a traitor?"
> "That be far from me, my lord," (*Absit, absit.*)

Mr. Fry's version, near the end of Act II, reads:

> BECKET: I pray it may come. But looking towards England now
> Something tells me I am parting from you
> As one you may see no more in this life.
>
> HENRY: Heaven forgive us, do you think I intend
> Any treachery to you?
>
> BECKET: May it be a long way from your wish.

There is nothing larky here, but the revisions are all in the direction of softness. The language neutralizes the dramatic situation; the original narrative has a far higher acid content. And this process persists

[2] CURTMANTLE, by *Christopher Fry*. Oxford University Press. $3.50.

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throughout the play, staining the characters with a curious blur of languor. Eleanor herself; she issues from Miss Kelly's book and from any other sources I have encountered as a woman of tremendous verve and style, but Mr. Fry's Eleanor bears a fatal resemblance to the pacifist and mildly quizzical Countess of *The Dark is Light Enough*. Between any two opposing characters Mr. Fry's language can be relied on to insert a safety curtain of foam rubber. Here is a 'high' moment in one of the King's attacks upon Becket:

> Contradictory power is what you propose.
> There is hardly one thing I have reached out for
> In these last months, which hasn't been obstructed
> From Canterbury. But I see you, Becket:
> You mean the Church to be answerable for nothing
> Except itself, and yourself to be answerable
> Only to the old would-be infallible Italian
> Who rattles his keys of heaven and hell whichever
> Way expedience turns him.

It would be strong stuff as after-dinner conversation. For interest, I looked up a corresponding speech of the King to More in *A Man for All Seasons:*

> No opposition I say! No opposition! Your conscience is your own affair; but you are my Chancellor! There, you have my word—I'll leave you out of it. But I don't take it kindly, Thomas, and I'll have no opposition! I see how it will be; the Bishops will oppose me. The full-fed, hypocritical 'Princes of the *Church*'! Ha! As for the Pope!—Am I to burn in Hell because the Bishop of Rome with the Emperor's knife to his throat mouths me Deuteronomy? Hypocrites! They're all hypocrites! Mind they do not take you in, Thomas! Lie low if you will, but I'll brook no opposition—no words, no signs, no letters. . . .

I should not like to have the question of Verse Drama vs. Prose Drama decided by an adjudication of these two passages. Mr. Fry moves in and out of verse according to a principle which I have failed to decipher, but this again does not matter, his prose is just as soft as his verse. I don't think Robert Bolt is a born dramatist but he writes a virile idiom and his view of life contains little foam rubber.

Part of the trouble with *Curtmantle* is that Mr. Fry tried to stuff hundreds of things into it. The Prologue shows Henry's camp, the common people, the King on *chevauchée*. In Act I Becket is made Archbishop as well as Chancellor; he resigns the office, and the conflict with Henry begins. In Act II Henry and Becket struggle over the Constitution of Clarendon; the young Henry's coronation; a bogus reconciliation; Becket's murder is reported; the King in anguish. Act III shows Eleanor's Court of Love at Poitiers, her capture by Henry,

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and the emergence of Richard Coeur-de-Lion. Several incidents of great importance are inserted, some very cleverly, but they have the effect of marginal anecdotes, captions, news flashes; six mild lines of verse dispose of Rosamond Clifford, although it was Henry's carry-on with that lady which more than anything else made Eleanor set up house in Poitiers. Even Tennyson gave better measure. When this material is diluted, the result is baby-food.

The Dark is Light Enough still seems to me Mr. Fry's best play, but it was a lucky break. There was indeed a genuine relation between the toned-down language and the structure of the play; a circle whose still, pacifist, 'perfect' centre is the Countess and whose circumference is everywhere. The style criticised the agression of the Austrians and the Hungarians and set up its own pacifist values. In *Curtmantle* this is no longer a feasible issue, and Mr. Fry has the chore of dramatising acts and sufferances which are irrevocable. I do not find that he succeeds in the basic task of the dramatist, to make his acts and agents *interesting*; these figures are far livelier in the history-books. Mr. Fry has written several rather girlish plays to declare that Life is Miracle and God is Yours and Mine; he can hardly prolong the lesson. It seems to me that he has now progressively less to say. The muted style is not, then, sackcloth-and-ashes; it is a certain engaging tact which prompts a civilized man, having little to say, to say it quietly.

***Notes on Contributors** (Cont.)*

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